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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the findings of a research project involving a consortium of American art museums that joined forced to understand themselves better from the perspective of their visitors. The project had three objectives: (1) to identify staff expectations and impressions of public expectations about art museums; (2) to evaluate public expectations about art museums and compare them to actual experiences; and (3) to explore educational insights of visitors and nonvisitors of art museums. Eleven art museums participated in this project and focus group methodology was used. Five to six focus groups were conducted for each of the museums. Divided into three parts, part 1 of the report contains the summary of the museum focus groups and outlines the major findings for the following topics: staff expectations; nonvisitation; museum experience; orientation; information; layout and organization; physical surroundings and presentations; communication of benefits; and employees. Part 2 presents the proceedings of a colloquium held in Phoenix, Arizona, November 15-18, 1989, concerning the focus group experiment. Part 3 consists of Museum Project synopses. Each participating museum was looking for visitor reactions to different projects. Summaries describe these projects, their perceived needs, objectives, and estimated expenses. A list of colloquium participants concludes the report. (KM)

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INSIGHTS

MUSEUMS

VISITORS

ATTITUDES

EXPECTATIONS

A FOCUS GROUP EXPERIMENT

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in the Arts and The J. Paul Getty Museum

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Sponsored by The Getty Center for Education
in the Arts and The J. Paul Getty Museum

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FOREWORD

More than a million people visit art museums in this country every day. Many more do not come at all.

There is no doubt that museums are potent educators. Museums have the power to quicken the mind, exalt the spirit, trigger curiosity, stimulate the imagination, and open avenues of perception and discovery. Increasing the visitors' capacities for these experiences and enabling museums to provide the conditions to nurture these experiences are important goals of the Getty Center for Education in the Arts and the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Insights: Museums, Visitors, Attitudes, and Expectations reports the findings of a research project involving a consortium of American art museums that joined forces to understand themselves better from the perspective of their visitors.

During the last ten years, museum education programs have expanded and diversified. But how do museums know whether or not these programs are having the effect they intended? And how can museums draw on the expertise of their curators, as well as their educators, to meet the needs of visitors? These two questions were paramount in the decision to use focus group methodology as an experiment with museum staffs and their visitors. Focus groups have been a mainstay in market research and politics for some time. In recent years, nonprofit organizations have discovered the usefulness of this technique for their own decision making. In our project, focus groups were the vehicle for learning more about the expectations that museum staffs hold for visitors and for understanding the perceptions and attitudes visitors have about museums.

Traditionally museums have used face-to-face interviews, questionnaires, and mail and telephone surveys to obtain information from visitors. Focus groups allow for group interaction and give greater insight into why certain opinions, expectations, and attitudes are held. Their particular advantage for museums is that they provide direct, detailed information from visitors about their needs, interests, and concerns. There is also an important bonus: focus groups are a means to engage all the professionals in a museum who are responsible for the quality of the visitor experience; more than other research techniques, they offer a direct and intimate experience with the visitor.

In 1987, eleven art museums agreed to participate in a focus group experiment with their staffs and visitors. The first section of this book summarizes the findings of these groups of staff, visitors, and nonvisitors. We are indebted to Alan Newman, who personally conducted all of the meetings, prepared separate reports for each museum, and wrote the final summary report included here. His ability to gain the confidence of the museum professionals he worked with and his skill at eliciting information from visitors were responsible in great measure for the success of this project.

After all the focus groups concluded, the Getty sponsored a colloquium for four representatives from each participating museum. The director, a curator, the head of education, and one other professional from each museum attended a three-day seminar to discuss what had been learned from the project. The participants heard Alan Newman's report and were provoked to think about the findings within the larger context of museum education by presentations from speakers outside the museum field, who brought their own fresh and diverse perspectives to the dialogue.

What has been the impact of this research project experiment on the eleven participating museums? The final section of this report contains synopses of projects these museums are undertaking as a direct consequence of their involvement in the focus group project. The synopses provide an overview of how museums are responding to the issues and concerns voiced by their visitors.

Reports by the Commission on Museums for a New Century and the American Association of Museums' Task Force on Education have concluded that museums have yet to realize their full potential as educational institutions. We hope that the information from the Getty's focus group project will be a useful addition to the field and contribute to the realization of this potential.

Leilani Lattin Duke
Director
Getty Center for Education in the Arts

John Walsh
Director
J. Paul Getty Museum

Fall 1990

PART I

MUSEUM FOCUS GROUPS SUMMARY REPORT

Submitted by
Alan Newman Research

Purpose and Method

This report summarizes the findings of a research project conducted for the Getty Center for Education in the Arts and the J. Paul Getty Museum. The project emerged from the Getty's interest in utilizing new methods for visitor studies, exploring art museums as education institutions, and elucidating visitor expectations about art museums. The specific objectives of this project were threefold:

1. to identify staff expectations and impressions of public expectations about art museums;
2. to evaluate public expectations about art museums and compare them to actual experiences; and,
3. to explore educational insights of visitors and nonvisitors of art museums.

Eleven art museums participated in this project:

The Art Institute of Chicago (Ch)
The Brooklyn Museum (Bk)
The Cleveland Museum of Art (Cl)
Dallas Museum of Art (D)
Denver Art Museum (De)
The J. Paul Getty Museum (G)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (B)
The National Gallery of Art (NGA)
Philadelphia Museum of Art (P)
Seattle Art Museum (S)
The Toledo Museum of Art (T)

The project was conducted using focus group methodology. Focus groups are widely used in market and consumer research, but represent a relatively new technique for museum visitor studies. The method consists of round-table discussions among eight to twelve prescreened participants selected from a targeted population. The group is led by a trained moderator who follows a discussion outline prepared in consultation with the client. Focus groups are held in special facilities with a conference room for the group discussion and an observation room behind a one-way mirror. Facilities are equipped with audio and videotape recording equipment for record keeping.

As a qualitative research technique, focus groups serve two important objectives. First, they provide insight into visitor attitudes, perceptions, and behavior. Second, they provide a catalyst for communication among the observers of the group (i.e., those people behind the one-way mirror). Often the interaction among observers is as powerful a product of the research as the findings themselves. This is what attracted the Getty and its museum consortium to this methodology. By observing the public discuss their education and experiential insights after a museum visit, it was hypothesized that the museum professionals (administrators, educators, and curators) would engage in a fruitful dialogue and develop a clearer understanding of the role of education in art museums. These processes, it was speculated, would promote team building among the professional staff.

Five to six focus groups were conducted for each of the eleven museums. The first group, called a "consensus group," consisted of members of the museum's professional staff. The objectives of this internal group were

- to achieve "buy-in" and support for the objectives of the project;
- to identify the types of consumers to be included in the "outside" focus groups;
- to design the assignment that consumers would be asked to complete while visiting the museum; and
- to identify the staff's perspectives on the educational and experiential role of the museum.

Following the museum staff consensus group, two pairs of focus groups were conducted with consumers. One pair of groups was conducted with visitors to the museum and the other pair was conducted with nonvisitors (or in some cases, people who had not visited since childhood). Staff members who attended the consensus group attended the consumer focus groups as observers.

The components of each pair of consumer focus groups were

1. a preliminary focus group during which expectations about a museum visit were discussed;
2. a visit to the museum with an assignment to see specific galleries identified by the staff in the consensus group. Participants were asked to keep a diary of their visit; and,

3. a follow-up focus group to discuss participants' actual experiences and how they compared to their expectations.

Participants for each pair of groups were recruited on the telephone by professional interviewers and screened on the basis of the following demographic criteria:

- Approximately one-half of the participants were men and one-half women.
- Nonvisitors had annual family incomes of at least $25,000.
- Nonvisitors had at least high school diplomas.
- In some cities a racial/ethnic quota required Asian, African-American, and/or Hispanic representation in each pair of groups.
- The frequency of visitation was varied.

An optional second consensus group consisting of museum staff who had observed the various groups was held a day after the second set of the consumer focus groups. This provided an opportunity for synthesizing observations and formulating internal museum agenda.

This report provides a general summary of findings across the eleven art museums. It has been written to be as concise and easily read as possible. Major findings appear at the top of each section and are followed by supporting conclusions. Verbatim quotations provide examples of the richness and depth of the data collected. Quotations are italicized and identified by museum and type of participant (visitor or nonvisitor).

The conclusions presented represent universal findings from the focus groups at the eleven museums. They have been derived from an analysis of the individual reports submitted to each museum. There was remarkable consistency across all museums, making the analysis relatively straightforward. However, as with all qualitative research, conclusions may vary from analyst to analyst. Thus, readers who are interested in greater detail, delving more deeply into a particular finding, exploring a specific museum, or comparing across several specific museums, are encouraged to read the individual museum reports or watch the videotapes of the actual group sessions.

Major Findings

STAFF EXPECTATIONS

Museum professionals want visitors to have positive, meaningful experiences and to leave with the desire to return in the future.

Meaningful experience—Staff members realize that visitors come to art museums from a variety of backgrounds and with a variety of expectations and objectives. They hope that visitors experience the museum in whatever way is most meaningful to them. This results in vague expectations. For example:

Because I have a sense that people are interested in so many different things, it is my hope that we can serve all of those people. (Bk)

Having...a really satisfactory experience on whatever level, that would encourage them to come back again. (Cl)

Everybody coming in comes in from a different educational background and a different level of education, and hopefully...we have established a program that will enable each person to plug into the system at whatever level they are at. (NGA)

Whatever their expectation was, that they went away saying those things were in some way met. (G)

In my view, any experience they have in this building is okay on any level. (D)

I hope that visitors will feel comfortable and confident enough to deal with [the objects] at whatever level. (B)

I'd like people to have personally rewarding encounters with visual objects. (De)

Interacting with the work of art in a way that gives a visitor some feeling of having had a worthwhile experience. (T)

Intellectual curiosity—Staff members said that they hope certain objects arouse intellectual curiosity and inspire visitors to want to learn more about specific artists, eras, and schools of art.

For them to be stimulated by what they see here, to seek out something that interested them in another collection somewhere else or to come back here....Curiosity that would lead them to wonder about what these objects mean and seek a kind of contact. (Bk)

That it would pique somebody's interest. That they've had an experience with the art and suddenly they say, "Now I want more information." (NGA)

I want them to say, "That's weird, but I want to know more." (S)

I'd like for people to have a sense of surprise, to be curious about every variety of art and culture. (D)

A delight in what they have seen and a continuing interest in what they have learned. (Cl)

Most importantly, a motivation to return. That something whetted their appetite to the degree where they felt, "There's something I want to see again, to study again, to experience again." (De)

Emotional reactions—Staff members said they would like visitors to • ***"connect" with specific objects;*** • ***imagine themselves back in time and fantasize about life in past eras and other civilizations;*** • ***react to object's beauty and craftsmanship; and,*** • ***remember specific objects after they leave the museum.***	The one thing which I would want the person to come away with is an abiding desire to remember forever one work of art, something which really impressed [him] enormously. (Bk) Frankly, if we were to find someone who found a favorite painting that [he/she] would like to come back and look at again, this would be hope for the future in a certain way. (NGA) I'm happiest when people get turned on or excited. (G) I'd like everyone who comes to the museum to have a response, not to be neutral. (D)	That people would connect with something specific. (B) If nothing stands out, then you have failed. If they remember a particular Monet, if they remember the texture on a mask, then an event has occurred. (Ch) Being animated as they recall vividly an experience that is related to an object. (De) That there be something that really touches them or moves them. (P)
Educational experience—It is hoped that visitors learn about specific artists, cultures, eras, and schools of art from the objects.	That they intend to learn something about culture, about artists, about the creative process that they might not have known before. (NGA) I hope that when they are here they're not only learning new things, a better sense of the past and foreign countries...[but that they also] get a sense of these objects fitting into a human tradition, make discoveries about the past, the present, other people, themselves. (G) I also hope that they are going to learn something, that they are going to go away with a slightly greater sense of the history of art than they came in with. (B)	Our job is to educate the uninformed public. We are trying to educate and develop interest. (Ch) When visitors leave here, they feel a heightened sense of self-identity with past and contemporary cultures...they can see themselves as part of some ongoing cultural continuum. (De) The museum should be a didactic place, an education place. (T)
Civic pride—Museum professionals want visitors to feel proud of their city's art museum. National Gallery staff members, for example, would like people to perceive something "uniquely American" about the Gallery and to consider it "the nation's art museum."	One question that I'm interested in is [why] we call this "The National Gallery" and whether visitors to this institution...perceive something uniquely national about this place or uniquely American. (NGA) What I would like to know is if those people have a sense...that this is their museum....Is there, nevertheless, a sense of attachment and pride? (S) Feel that this is the center of the mind and the heartbeat of Dallas. (D)	If they were from this city, that they would be proud when they left....If they were from somewhere else, that they would be a little bit jealous of it. (B) Feel some stake in the institution. (Cl) That it's a very impressive building that more often than not tends to induce civic pride. (P)

Comfortable and welcome—It is important for visitors to feel comfortable, welcome, and unintimidated.

My concern is that we have a very "user-friendly" museum. (Bk)

I want people to feel comfortable. (S)

I would like people to feel comfortable here coming in and throughout their whole visit so that they feel they may belong here and therefore feel it is a place to come back to. (G)

They have to be totally comfortable in the museum environment. They have to feel welcome and believe that they belong. It can't be perceived as an intimidating experience. (Ch)

Original works of art—It is expected that people realize the objects are original works of art, not reproductions.

My hope is that visitors leave here realizing that the museum is about significant original objects. (G)

A very high priority of mine is that people leave feeling they have seen original works of art. Not reproductions. (Ch)

At the most rudimentary level what we are trying to achieve is making great works of art, of the best artistic quality, accessible. (Ch)

"Special place"—Art museums should be havens where visitors can relax and escape from the everyday world.

I'd also like to see that shared experience... where if you're here with someone you can talk with that person about something that's not mundane. (G)

I would like to see visitors feel that this is a special place, apart from the everyday world, where they come for a few hours of enjoyment and relaxation, and that they gain some new understanding about themselves. (G)

Restorative. (T)

Refreshing, that it would be distracting, would take our attention away from the stresses. (T)

Variety—It is hoped that visitors notice the variety and diversity of objects and collections at the art museums. Staff members want their museums to be perceived as unique.

I think we have something for everyone because we are a general art museum. (D)

That it was a little different from other places, positively. That there was something in the way things were presented or the atmosphere to the museum that made it a different, a better experience than going to the Met or any other museum. (Bk)

I also hope that the experience is something that is different from other parts of life and other galleries and other museums. (B)

One thing I think is special about this place is that on a small scale, there are a lot of different types of objects one can see close together. So I would expect that people would get a sense that a work of art is not only people painting. (G)

The main thing I'd like them to come away with is an appreciation for the variety. (De)

NONVISITATION

There is no single reason for nonvisitation. Reasons fall into one or more categories.

Intimidation—Art museums are intimidating. Nonvisitors perceive the following:

- ***They will be unable to understand and appreciate the objects at the museum because they know nothing about art.***
- ***Everyone who visits art museums is knowledgeable about art.***
- ***The museum will not provide information to help them appreciate and learn about the objects they are seeing.***
- ***Art museums are for the upper class only.***
- ***They have to dress up to visit an art museum.***
- ***Talking in normal conversational tones is inappropriate in an art museum.***

I'm embarrassed because I don't know what the stuff means. My overall feeling about the museum is... people are there because they know what they are looking at and I don't.... I know there is something meaningful there, but I just can't figure out what it is. (NGA-NV)

I think in order to appreciate a lot of art, too, you have to... know a little bit of something about the time period it's in. (S-NV)

I've always had somewhat of an image of the Getty [Museum] as being a little bit stuffy, as not a relaxed place you might wander around at and have fun at. (G-NV)

You feel like you have to get dressed up. (B-NV)

Slightly intimidating.... Art in this country has a strange habit of being for the elite class. (B-NV)

It is for the cultured or your rich people who appreciate the arts because they've had a chance to see paintings or because they own paintings. The moderate people don't get to experience the art or get the background to appreciate the art that's there. (Ch-NV)

I always pictured it as having pictures I would not understand.... It's supposed to mean something but I don't really understand it. (P-NV)

It's going to be so quiet that you will feel conspicuous if you cough or anything. (Cl-NV)

Lack of awareness—Nonvisitors are unaware of specific objects and exhibits at their city's art museum. They are not sure if there is anything there that would interest them, and their attention is drawn to more aggressive competitors such as zoos, science museums, and other attractions.

I have no idea what's in the museum. There may be things there that would really be interesting. I'm just lethargic. (S-NV)

It hasn't had the PR that would get me in there. (G-NV)

Lack of advertisement or something to grab your attention to get people to go....You never hear anything on the art museum. (T-NV)

I have no earthly idea what would be in a museum in Dallas. Maybe some paintings. (D-NV)

I never heard of any real important thing that would drag people in. (P-NV)

I've never really heard a lot about the Brooklyn Museum, so maybe that's another reason why it wouldn't have occurred to me to go. (Bk-NV)

When you plan trips or do something together...you tend to go to more places that are advertised....You never hear of museums or those type things being advertised, so they don't immediately pop into your mind as a place to go. (B-NV)

People just don't think of going. It just doesn't occur to them. (B-NV)

When I would think about the Dallas Museum of Art, the only thing I could see is maybe they have some nice sculptures and paintings....I don't know if they've got anything internationally known or something spectacular....If I was in New York City or if I was in Chicago or Los Angeles, I'd be looking to see something spectacular....I just don't get that image with Dallas. (D-NV)

I also feel that the city of Denver does not advertise and promote the art museum. Many residents are not even aware that it, the museum, exists. (De-NV, diary)

It doesn't seem to be publicized. (G-NV)

I never really heard of the Getty Museum because the people that I know here that are into the arts don't go there. (G-NV)

Lack of advertisement or something to grab your attention to get people to go....You never hear anything on the art museum. (T-NV)

Lack of free time—Nonvisitors do not have a lot of spare time. They choose to spend their limited free time engaging in other activities.

I have other things that I prefer to do. (NGA-NV)

A lot of the time you have priorities, work, things to do on the house, or things to take the kids to. (S-NV)

I work. I don't have a lot of recreation time. (Cl-NV)

At 5:00 it closes, so during the week is definitely out of the question. Saturday is catch-up day and Sunday is supposed to be completely our day. (B-NV)

It just hasn't been high enough up on my priority [list]. (De-NV)

No interest—Some nonvisitors are not interested in art and expect that they would be bored at an art museum.

I think in my stage of my life, I'm just not interested. (S-NV)

I'm just much more interested in things that are active. To me, going around and just walking and looking at pictures is not really active enough. (NGA-NV)

I guess the National Gallery just doesn't have any interest. (NGA-NV)

You go to an art museum, if you weren't walking, you'd probably sleep through the entire trip. (B-NV)

I went when I was in school and nothing really interests me. (T-NV)

Location—Location is sometimes cited as a reason for nonvisitation.

- ***Nonusers' primary reason for not visiting the Brooklyn Museum focuses on its "end of the world," "unsafe" location.***
- ***The necessity of making advance parking reservations deters people from visiting The J. Paul Getty Museum.***
- ***Some people perceive that The Cleveland Museum of Art is located in a dangerous neighborhood.***

My interests are in Manhattan, not Brooklyn, so why bother? (Bk-NV)

It takes a real conscious effort to go to some place like that where you really have to set an exact time. (S-NV)

I always hear that parking is a problem. You have to call ahead for parking. (G-NV)

The distance. I don't even think of going to the museum. (Cl-NV)

Living in the suburbs and not being real familiar with the area down there, I was always reluctant about parking, getting lost. (P-NV)

I'm ashamed of never having been to the Getty. . . . I guess it is the laziness of having to commit. It's something we like to do spontaneously. We don't want to have to make reservations and the parking, that part is just a turnoff. (G-NV)

MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

The museum experience is meaningful and rewarding for first-time and repeat visitors.

The experience is individual. Different people experience the museums in different ways. Museum visits are educational and promote an understanding of history and various cultures and eras.

African Art and Leadership was a great exhibit because you could get a glimpse of the African people. (Bk-V, diary)

It definitely was an educational and cultural experience. (NGA-NV)

The museum showed me that "art" can take on many forms, not just "old master paintings." (D-NV)

I do think you learn something from it.... I think I got a better understanding of the period. (Cl-NV)

There were exhibits that made you feel almost "spooky-like" in touch with the American Indians. (De-NV)

Visitors gain an understanding of the basic similarities and universal concerns of all cultures across time.

You can see how cultures are different yet [have] some basic similarities, i.e., human life, animal life, and nature in all people of all times. (Bk-V, diary)

I was amazed that things that are so old resemble so much of what we have today. (G-NV)

I'm so struck by the differences of cultures—East and West. Both cultures often seem to be inspired by religious themes. (Cl-V)

It was fascinating to explore the different cultures, but most of the cultures were very similar in nature. (De-V, diary)

It's a history lesson [for] me. I like to look at things from the past and actually make a connection with the present. There are some things that haven't changed very much. (P-V)

Certain objects arouse intellectual curiosity and inspire fantasies about past eras and foreign cultures.

I really was able to look at the paintings for awhile and be taken back in time. (NGA-NV)

You take yourself back in time. (D-V)

The museum inspired me to want to go back and learn more. It prompted me to ask questions about things I had not previously given thought to. (D-NV, diary)

I would love to spend several hours just thinking about each [Asian] piece and its history. They seem to evoke my adventurous nature. (B-V)

You just close your eyes and you're there. (P-V)

It makes you wonder what it was like, but you really don't know. You can imagine. (T-V)

Visiting the museum is an emotional, exhilarating experience.	I left [the Heinz exhibition] completely fulfilled. I was really overjoyed. (NGA-V) A light mood, springy.... This [Impressionist] room just made me feel good. (B-V)	I felt good being so emotionally drained. It had so many highs and lows. (Ch-NV) A very good and exciting experience. (De-V) Exhilarated. I really got excited about some of it. (P-NV)
The beauty, age, and craftsmanship of the objects surprises and excites viewers.	When I walked in, I thought they were pictures, photographs, but then after I took a closer look, I realized they were paintings. They were just incredible. I didn't know anyone could paint that well. (NGA-NV) Incredible feeling of awe at viewing [Egyptian] pieces so old. (S-V, diary) The detail of the vases was what struck me. (G-V)	I was overwhelmed by the beauty, age, and condition of the exhibits. (Cl-NV, diary) It's awe-inspiring for me to look at paintings and pieces of art that were made hundreds of years ago.... It gives you goose bumps when you go in and see them. It's a very special feeling. (P-V)
Visitors "connect" with specific objects and remember them after they leave the museum. Some said that they would return in the future to see favorite objects.	There were also some impressive paintings that I want to go back and see. Things like *Storm Over the Rockies.* That can really knock your socks off. (Bk-NV) [*Spring*] was the most breathtaking piece of art I have ever seen in my life. I just sat there and looked and looked and looked. It was totally incredible.... I got chilled, that isn't even the word for it. (G-NV) I was at that painting at least twenty-five minutes, just that painting. (Bk-NV) Keep remembering parts of some of the block prints. (S-V, diary) I found I could identify myself or some feeling for the paintings without having to appreciate strokes.... I really was able to look at the painting for a while and be taken back into time. So far this is not as bad as I thought. I think you can really transcend. But, I *still* think you may have to be forced or try to get into it. Definitely [you] can't walk through. You must stop and *absorb* and you will find. (NGA-NV)	The Korean room, as I entered I had the most peaceful feeling.... It just made [me] feel like [I was] in a museum in Korea. I felt Korean. (B-V) This room was one of the highlights of my tour. Seeing the beautiful handwriting with colored illustrations was an amazing experience for me. Just thinking of the time required for one book is incomprehensible. (G-V, diary) I would stare. Sometimes you could see sadness, [sometimes] joy. Some paintings were just denoting survival. [There were] just certain communications you could receive from certain paintings, but you couldn't rush by. (P-V) While standing and just watching the Japanese Tea House, I could not help but fantasize what it would be like residing in Japan and visiting a tea house. (P-V, diary)

Subjects, techniques, colors, and brushstrokes of different artists and schools of art are studied, compared, and contrasted.	You could definitely see the development from this school to that school from the different dates. (NGA-V) I noticed as I went along how each [Impressionist] had [his/her] own style and [what] colors they chose. (B-V) I simply sat for a while looking around [the sculpture court] and observing the similarities and differences in the sculptures. (Cl-V) I wasn't paying too much attention to the dates, not the time periods, but to the similarities of the arts.... (De-NV) It was visually stimulating for me. The collection was good and covered many different regions in Africa, which allowed me to see the different artistic techniques of this continent. (Bk-V, diary)	I did find a lot of connection between the paintings.... I could see a stream running through all the paintings. That made me appreciate it too. (NGA-V) All of these seem to be similar in their techniques and styles. (B-V, diary) Asian art was quite fascinating. The art was so intense. The colors were vibrant and I noticed the pictures related [to] death and mystic legends of the sea. (B-NV, diary) [There are] so many colors. The definition (depth) of the paintings is brilliant. (Cl-NV, diary) Impressed by their light colors and live colors and designs, reflecting their free spirit and [the] way of life of the American Indian. (De-V, diary)
Art museums provide an escape from reality because of their peaceful, relaxed atmosphere.	Spending a few hours among these paintings relaxes me and makes me feel lighter hearted when I leave. (NGA-V) I was so calmed and recharged by the experience. Truly a soul event. (G-V, diary) I go there when I want to be alone, quiet, when I just want to think. For me, it's a place to get a little serenity back in my life. (B-V)	A great escape. When I walked in the door until I left, it was a totally different world. I could totally forget everything. (Ch-NV) It takes away your depression. Sometimes you can walk in and feel so down and out, and when you leave you feel really good about everything. (De-V) I always find it tranquil. I always find myself at peace, almost like going to the synagogue. It's a very, very peaceful and good feeling. (P-V)

The environment fosters communication about related and unrelated subjects. It provides an arena for shared experiences as well as self-discovery and introspection.

It's a way to bring my wife and [me] together. It provides a setting for us to talk about things that we otherwise don't talk about. (Ch-V)

It's a good way to have a shared experience. (Ch-V)

Sometimes your thoughts are elsewhere. You might be working out problems within your own mind. (De-V)

It's a good place to just talk, too. (De-V)

I think that when I come in the art museum, it poses all kinds of thought-provoking questions. . . . It's mental exercise. (Cl-V)

You get in more of a reflective mood. You're outside of the hustle and bustle. (D-V)

Sometimes after I've had a real intense week I get up on Saturday morning and go to the art museum by myself. It's a distraction from my routine. (De-V)

It takes away your depression. Sometimes you can walk in and feel so down and out, and when you leave you feel really good about everything. (De-V)

When I take my kids, I have a chance to talk with them about things we usually don't discuss because we're too busy running around. (De-V)

It's a great place to get inspiration, something to help you think, especially if you're in a troubled time, a real stressful time. (T-V)

It gives you kind of a perspective on your own life. All my petty problems aren't really that important when I look at this great thing. When you leave you look at the world a different way. It gives me more of an upbeat feeling. (T-V)

The experiences of most first-time visitors to the museum exceed their expectations.

- ***The art is more interesting than expected.***
- ***The size and variety of the collections exceed expectations.***
- ***The experience is less intimidating than expected.***
- ***First-time visitors spend more time at the museum than planned.***
- ***They intend to revisit in the future.***

The people are much more casual and non-art experts than I imagined. (NGA-NV, diary)

It was more impressive than I thought it would be. It was quite large, excellent collections generally. (Bk-NV)

I described it like going to the doctor—something you ought to do every few years. (NGA-NV)

I went there expecting to be bored. It proved me wrong. I was interested in a lot of stuff. (B-NV)

I felt it was very warm and comfortable and I think that's why a lot of people felt at ease to speak up, to have observations and expressions. That to me was surprising. I was expecting stark, white walls and big huge rooms, hard wood floors. (G-NV)

It was more interesting than I had anticipated. (D-NV)

It was not what I expected. It was much more informative and closer to a history museum. (De-NV)

First-time visitors in Chicago and Seattle found the art museums boring and said they did not meet their expectations. They will not return without some impetus.

It's too small. I was expecting it to be a little bigger. (S-NV)

I though it would be a little bit more extensive collection. (S-NV)

I had the feeling that I had seen the permanent exhibits and wouldn't need to look at them again. If the museum is in a more convenient location, like downtown, and a specific exhibit that appeals to my taste comes in, I'll be back. (S-NV)

There's no excitement there. You have to create your own excitement. (Ch-NV)

The museum was still just a lot of hallways and rooms with pictures and objects set in them. I didn't feel any source or presence in a room that took me away to that period of time. I don't think that I will go back for quite awhile unless maybe the exhibits I didn't see were talked about somewhere. (Ch-NV)

Some visitors were disappointed by the lack of paintings and objects by "masters" at The Cleveland Museum of Art, the Denver Art Museum, the Dallas Museum of Art, and The J. Paul Getty Museum.

I think the Museum would attract more people if there [were] at least one or two very well-known mainstream art pieces—like van Gogh or Cézanne. . . . I think the reason most people come away from the museum talking about the grounds and not the art is because the artists are mostly unfamiliar to the mainstream public. I couldn't remember one artist's name if I had to tell someone what artists are on display. (G-NV, diary)

I had hoped for more works of Monet, Degas, Pissarro, Renoir. (Cl-NV, diary)

It didn't have enough Impressionists. (D-V)

I'd like to see more masters. I was disappointed just with that. (De-V)

I was somewhat surprised they didn't have more of the modern, abstract, or Impressionist type exhibits. (Cl-NV)

I wish I saw more paintings. (Cl-NV)

You get a message coming in that if you're looking for Renoir and van Gogh, you've come to the wrong place. (D-V)

I think the whole place is lacking in paintings. That's what I go to see. (De-V)

I did expect to see more paintings. . . . I expected to see more European artists. . . . I would have preferred to see a little bit more painting. (De-NV)

When I think of an art museum, I think of paintings, I think of sculptures. (De-NV)

ORIENTATION

Orientation is a problem at all eleven museums.

Introductory information on how to organize the visit, what to see, and how the museum is arranged is needed.

I felt lost when I first entered, like what am I doing here. (D-NV)

You feel out of place because you don't know your way around psychologically. You don't feel comfortable with the environment. (D-NV)

I was kind of nervous because I really didn't know where to go. (De-NV)

More direction at the beginning when you first walk in the door. (P-NV)

I think... you don't know enough about the painters or the people who are doing the artwork. Maybe if there [were] more told about who the people are and you got some background on the artist, or there were some flyers passed out, or you got a mailing telling about the people who [were] showing there, that might help. If you know the background of a painter maybe you are more apt to go in and see that person. (Ch-NV)

Impossible to find your way around. I felt like I was in a rat maze. (Cl-NV)

I did have a little hard time finding my way around. (Cl-NV)

I sat down prepared to hear about how to become a member of the art museum. I expected to sit down and hear a little bit about each area, maybe even about the exhibit that was in the hallway or about the children's exhibit, or some history about the Museum... some history about Dallas would have been really great. (D-V)

I think they should have somebody that you go around with to show you and explain to you. I don't want to stand there by myself and feel lost just looking at a painting and not understanding. (De-NV)

That was a problem I found too. When you first walk in there, which way do you go? (De-NV)

I found it a little difficult. There wasn't anything pointing which direction you should go. (P-NV)

There was no organized pattern, I felt. You would just flow through the place. (P-NV)

More direction at the beginning when you first walk in the door. (P-NV)

The assignment provided by the museums to focus group members was helpful because it gave direction and helped participants focus on a limited number of exhibits instead of trying to see the entire museum. Consequently, participants said they learned more and had a better appreciation and understanding of the objects.	Having this extra assignment was kind of special. I think also I paid more attention to details and what I was looking at. (NGA-V) I probably wouldn't have done so much thinking about what I was doing if I hadn't been taking notes and taking part in this thing here. I think the whole thing opened my eyes to another way of looking at things. (B-V)	Having an assignment like we did enabled me to really look around and find things I might not have looked for. (P-V, diary)
Important objects and those by famous artists need to be highlighted so that they stand out and are not missed. A brochure suggesting museum highlights would be a useful orientation tool.	I sort of missed paintings, I think. If they had been more highlighted.... There was a Picasso stuck in the Impressionist room, which I thought was somewhat odd. Highlight a painting as important as that. (Bk-NV) Do they have a listing of famous artists and where to find them? Would there be a listing of da Vinci in Gallery 6 or that kind of thing? (NGA-NV)	I wanted a little more emphasis on some of the masters and on some of the things I already knew about. (Cl-NV)
Several first-time visitors began their visit with the assumption that some of the objects were not originals.	Is everything original in there or are there some copies? I just imagine that every museum can't have a van Gogh or a Picasso. There's just not enough to go around, so I'd imagine they'll probably have some copies. (De-NV)	I know there will either be works or copies of works by the old masters.... I don't think there will be any originals unless a collection has been loaned to the art museum. (P-NV)
Orientation films are interesting, informative, and helpful. ***• Orientation films at the National Gallery and the Getty Museum are appreciated.*** ***• Dallas visitors perceive that the orientation film is limited in scope. It should provide a broad overview of the museum's collections, not focus exclusively on contemporary art.***	I found the auditorium presentation [on twentieth-century art] very helpful. We went there first. I found it very informative. (NGA-V) The orientation film was extremely good. It outlined the collections available in a concise and well-presented form. (G-NV, diary)	I would like to have seen the orientation film be more an overview of the entire museum's history and collections and the features and events, etc. I thought the film was too limited in scope. (D-NV, diary)

Information about the availability of tours and programs needs to be more readily available and more prominently displayed.

I saw this tour going, but I didn't know that it was part of the museum. I thought that it was some lady that was taking a church *group or something. I was trying to listen to* what they were saying, but I thought I would be intruding. (S-NV)

I always liked tours in museums, but [I] never notice them in the Institute. How do they publicize them? (Ch-V)

I would look at them and I would say I wish someone would come along and tell me how to appreciate this because I know it's probably a beautiful painting. (B-NV)

I asked about tours. No one could give me a definite answer when they were or if they were. (Ch-NV)

Have tour guides and if you want to go on the tour, fine. If you don't, fine too. I think it's very important (Cl-NV)

People aren't aware of these guided tours and to get the most out of the museum, a suggestion would be when you call...that that is suggested. (G-V)

INFORMATION

First-time and repeat visitors want information so they can learn about what they are seeing.

Information increases appreciation of the art. The more visitors know about a particular object and its background, the greater their connection with it.

I became aware of how important knowledge is to appreciation. I had noticed Ensor's work...but recoiled from it. I wouldn't say that I like Ensor's painting, but I value it now that I understand something about it. (G-V)

Some of the things that I did relate to more....I enjoyed more. (B-V)

The sculpture garden has a fascination to it, but it has to grow on you while you're there. The more you read, [the more] you'll get interested in it. (Cl-V)

I enjoyed the Classic Court more than the American pictures. I think a lot of the reason is the descriptions underneath. They told more about the objects and the art...than [about] the paintings....(T-NV)

I found I was moved much more when I had information. I saw the Rembrandt...and as she explained it to me, it moved me so much more. She was talking about the subject of the painting so I felt like I understood it. (G-V)

I can appreciate the beauty of the Egyptian art because even the way they made a bowl is beautifully artistic, the carving and the painting. I don't really know that much. Having knowledge of the subject, I think, makes it a lot more interesting to you. This is something I never really studied, so it does take away a little bit of the enhancement and enjoyment. (Bk-NV)

I think, in order to appreciate a lot of art, too, you have to...know a little bit of something about the time period it's in. (S-NV)

I get frustrated when I go to an exhibit, I always get the little brochure and it never has enough information. It should have a longer paragraph for each painting telling me what I'm supposed to think about. Like all of the portraits. Who are all of those people? Why did they have their portrait painted? (Ch-V)

The perceived lack of information is frustrating: it detracts from the museum experience.

[Renaissance galleries], if you don't know religion, you're not going to know what these are supposed to be. There really wasn't any [information] and there should have been. It would have made it a lot more interesting. (NGA-NV)

The museum is supposed to teach us about our history as a people and it fell short of that. If I'm going to pay money to see something, I want to be taught. (S-NV)

Every gallery that I've gone into, I've wished that there was more explanation, discussion, something there I could use to understand what it is, what's going on here. (B-V)

The more questions I had, the more frustrated I became because I couldn't find any answers. (Ch-V)

I walked away again with a feeling of frustration because I would like more information. (P-V)

I was a little disappointed. There was really no background information on a lot of the items, how they were made, why they were used, what they symbolized.... It was just sort of all there. It was beautiful but there was no history behind it. (P-NV)

I wish there was an easier way to get the information, and I wish there was more information that was provided. (Cl-V)

The availability and breadth of information provided on object labels is usually inadequate. Visitors would like more detailed descriptions of the following:

- ***the artist's life,***
- ***the subject of the art and its historic and artistic significance,***
- ***the school of art,***
- ***the background on the time period and culture represented,***
- ***the artist's technique, and***
- ***the method of creating the object and the tools used.***

Would prefer some more background on the artists and the period. (NGA-NV, diary)

Why are the [Renaissance] pictures here? Artwork (quality) or historical significance? (NGA-NV, diary)

At the beginning, as I started looking at the Japanese block prints, I wondered, "How did they get the finished picture?" It would have been nice to know what they did first, did they carve it, how did they get the colors and all? (S-V)

Telling about the period of time the artist lived in, what was behind this painting, what the composition was. Information sort of lends to understanding it. (S-NV)

Some more of the history would have been great [pre-Columbian]. (D-V)

It doesn't give you enough background on anything you're looking at. (B-V)

I would have liked a lot more, what the paintings were, why they were important, where does it fit into the evolution of painting. I found it very frustrating. (B-V)

Something about what made the painter paint the particular subject. (Cl-V)

Many times they would use terms that if you were really into history or really into art you would probably recognize, but which I didn't know. They would use the term and not explain it enough. It would leave me hanging. (De-NV)

When I left there I wanted more information, I was confused and wanted to know something about the characteristics of Impressionism. Some kind of a pamphlet would do it. I still don't know where to go and get this information. (Ch-V)

Art from non-Western cultures needs more interpretation. Explanations of cultural symbols and beliefs are needed to define their meaning and significance, especially for the following exhibits:

- ***Asian art exhibit, The Cleveland Museum of Art;***
- ***Asian collections, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston;***
- ***Africa, Oceanic, and Americas collections, The Art Institute of Chicago;***
- ***African Art and Leadership and Egyptian exhibits, The Brooklyn Museum;***
- ***Pre-Columbian art, the Dallas Museum of Art; and***
- ***the Japanese Tea House and Temple, the Philadelphia Museum of Art.***

This area [pre-Columbian] was not as interesting to me personally as some of the other areas. Because I know so little about these cultures and the historical perspective on them, I found it difficult to relate to [them]. (D-NV)

It seemed that there was so much mythology and legend in [the Asian galleries] that there was no description of. I felt that I could have gotten so much more out of it if I could have understood it more. There was nothing accompanying it. (B-V)

The description of the items on display in the African art was too dead and scientific sounding. I would have liked more information on when and where the artifacts were found. (Ch-NV)

I thought the African exhibit was pretty poor.... There wasn't enough explanation. I know they had a pamphlet that helped, but they should have had more of an explanation for each exhibit. (Bk-V)

I wish I knew more about the symbols in the sculpture and [about] the Asian philosophy of life. (Cl-V)

I thought the information at the Japanese Tea House just raised more questions than it answered. I wanted more information. I wanted to know what this said about the Japanese culture. (P-V)

Visitors need information explaining why sacred and ceremonial artifacts and everyday objects of life are considered "art" and belong in an art museum instead of a natural history museum. Specifically:

- ***Native American collection, the Denver Art Museum;***
- ***Africa, Oceania, and Americas exhibits, The Art Institute of Chicago;***
- ***African Art and Leadership, The Brooklyn Museum; and***
- ***Pre-Columbian exhibit, the Dallas Museum of Art.***

I feel that such artifacts are out of place in an "*art museum*"....I expect real art to cause an emotional reaction in me. (D-NV, diary)

I don't think of the Institute as a place to go to see primitive art. I usually think of the Field Museum [of Natural History] for that. You sometimes draw a line between history and art even though you know they are related. (Ch-V)

My opinion of art is real art, something you have put something into.... That is not what I consider art. (De-V)

I would expect to see that [Native American objects] more in a natural history museum than [in] an art museum.... I was expecting more of the European-type work in an art museum. (De-NV)

Additional information is necessary to describe the artists' intentions and the meaning of the objects in contemporary galleries. Visitors have difficulty understanding these objects and appreciating them as "art" because they see them as requiring little effort to create.

- ***Twentieth-century collection, The National Gallery of Art;***
- ***Twentieth-century galleries, the Philadelphia Museum of Art;***
- ***American galleries 1 and 3, The Toledo Museum of Art; and***
- ***Contemporary art, the Dallas Museum of Art.***

At least in other galleries you could appreciate the technique, I could not appreciate the technique of the downstairs twentieth-century because anybody really could take paint and put two colors on a canvas. (NGA-V)

This can't be art. (NGA-V, diary)

I just could not make any sense out of it. I'm sorry. I just stood there and said there must be something I'm supposed to see. (D-NV)

Is it art? It does nothing for me one way or the other emotionally. (NGA-V)

Why where they there? What did the artist have in mind when he did that? (P-V)

The twentieth-century art needed to be described more, since everybody was so confused about it, to understand how the artist was thinking. (P-NV)

In general, American and European paintings need somewhat less explanatory information than do other objects. The subjects and cultures depicted are more familiar, and therefore the paintings are more accessible and easily understood.

I really don't need a lot of information about paintings. (Bk-NV)

The European art spoke for itself. (P-NV)

Gallery notes are helpful. They need to be more visible, however; visitors are often unaware that they exist. They would be useful and appreciated in specific galleries and museums where they are not currently available.

[Renaissance] I read each handout as I was going along and was looking and could appreciate the picture and the technique and what was behind it more than just walking through. (NGA-V)

[*African Art and Leadership*] They told you about each item. Whatever you need to learn about it, it was written there. (Bk-NV)

When you go to a particular room, there should be something there like a little pamphlet that actually tells you what's in this particular room. (T-V)

When I left there, I wanted more information. I was confused and wanted to know about the characteristics of Impressionism. Some kind of pamphlet would do it. (Ch-V)

I'd like to see a book to let us know about all this different stuff that you could read while you were doing it. (B-NV)

Preferences vary as to the best means of communicating information. Brochures, self-guided audio tours, docent tours, audio and/or video presentations, and slide shows were suggested.

Might there be earphones and cassettes that could be at each station in the room if you want more? (S-V)

I prefer a person. It's more intimate, it's more personal. (G-V)

I think there should be some kind of sound system [so] that you can push a button, and they tell you something about it. (P-V)

Headphone rental for artifact explanations would be beneficial. (T-V, diary)

Guided tours for people who are interested. (T-NV)

I wish small booklets were available on the different collections—not audiotapes—because I want my first approach to a piece to be virginal. (Cl-V)

I would prefer a video at each section explaining. (G-V)

I myself would like a cassette as you come into the room explaining [that] you are entering this room and explaining why those pieces are there. (S-V)

If you had photographic blowups of some of the details of that jade. When about three other people got around one of those cases, that was it. You couldn't get in there and look at it. (S-NV)

Just to go in on your own, I think is going to be boring. If they had docents who take people around and give some type of tour that would explain this picture, some background, when was it painted, what were the circumstances it was painted under, what it is supposed to represent. Just a brief synopsis of each painting would make it much more entertaining and enjoyable. (NGA-NV)

It would be nice if they could have a recording... something to tell you about the room and some of the artists, so at least you have an idea of what you're looking at. (B-NV)

Have a little movie... that would say, "This is the layout of the museum, this is how we got here." An orientation to the museum. (Cl-NV)

Changes in the size, location, and lighting of object labels were suggested to improve their readability and accessibility, especially for older people.

Make larger plaques to give us some background. (NGA-V)

The print is too small.... (G-V)

A lot of the stuff was hard to read. It was dark. (Cl-NV)

I object to those little signs on the wall. A lot of paintings you don't want to get that close to look at them. (De-V)

A few people did not want additional information and did not use what is currently available. These individuals prefer to appreciate the objects for their beauty and draw their own conclusions about the objects' meanings and artists' intentions.

I read titles and read artists and looked at everything. Then when I saw something that caught my eye, I spent a long time going back and forth with it, which is what I like to do and why I shy away from pamphlets and brochures, I like to do it myself, sort of deny the history of it and think about what it means to me. (Bk-NV)

I view most art for its beauty and workmanship and the work that went into art. I really don't care a whole lot about the pains the artist went through. (Cl-V)

There are times when I simply don't want to read a word. I do a lot of things that just appeal to me visually.... You can go and enjoy and not read a word. (G-V)

LAYOUT AND ORGANIZATION

The layout and organization of the museums are confusing.

First-time and repeat visitors frequently get lost when trying to find specific galleries. This is a frustrating experience.

You do get lost, if you're looking for certain rooms. (B-V)

I got lost even after receiving directions from guards. (P-V, diary)

Had a hard time finding the African area. (Ch-NV)

In a number of places, if they had "You are here" kind of things on the wall.... Those are very helpful. (Bk-V)

A lot of museums have some flow to them. Without the map you'd be totally lost. (S-V)

Trying to find the American folk [art] and other areas on the lower level was tough. I felt like a rat in a maze. It should be better marked with signs and arrows. (B-V, diary)

The rooms are not well marked. Half the time I didn't know where I was and neither did the guards. (Ch-NV)

I also felt I was lost the whole time I was there. (Cl-NV)

You feel a little out of place because you don't know your way around psychologically. You don't feel comfortable with the environment. (D-NV)

I just felt there could have been more information—bigger and brighter—to tell you where you were going. (P-V)

Visitors have difficulty discerning a logical flow from one gallery to the next.

The way the rooms are laid out, it was really hard to feel a sense of continuity going through the [Japanese woodblock prints]. Even though they were very well-labeled, it felt chopped up to me. (S-V)

It was hard for me to flow from one end to the other.... They were all so concentrated, there wasn't a real flow. (G-NV)

There's no rhyme or reason to a lot of the rooms.... There's no good flow. (Cl-NV)

Should have a better sequence to the different periods of art in Europe and the Mediterranean. (De-V, diary)

There was no organized pattern, I felt. (P-NV)

I felt that chronologically it was backward. When you come out of the Classic Court, you should still be in an era when realism was important. To go from that to ultra modern was a jolt. (T-V)

It's always the same.... You don't have any changing of space.... It got a little repetitive there with the room size and the configuration. (S-V)

I could not have told you in each room what they were trying to communicate, other than the period of history. (Cl-NV)

It just seemed to be helter-skelter. (Cl-V)

It was sometimes difficult to determine which gallery was next in the flow of traffic. (G-NV, diary)

It was sort of like a maze when I first went in. (P-V)

Finding your way around this huge building is not very easy. (P-NV, diary)

Galleries tend to blend together. There is often no clear separation between different exhibits or types of art.	The other thing I found a little difficult was moving from era to era, place to place so quickly. Antiquities to Flemish painters, all kind of compact, like you were going from a compartment to a compartment to a compartment. (G-NV) Maybe make it more clear as to what each section is and where it ends. (D-V) Southeast Asian countries lumped together without respect for cultural differences that would affect their art. (B-V) The fourth floor is still a little confusing spatially, I thought. (De-V) You didn't really know exactly where [a particular period] started and when you were through with [it]. (P-NV) Areas are not clearly marked. I wasn't sure when I entered the pre-Columbian area. (D-V, diary) The changing of periods or eras could have been better explained—perhaps by signs as one entered a particular gallery. (G-NV, diary) I had no idea where twentieth-century art began or ended. (P-NV)
Gallery signs are often difficult to see, inconsistent from one exhibit to the next, or nonexistent.	I think the museum needs to better label each so that it's easy to find. (D-V) I find the museum most difficult to move about. Very poorly marked or directed even with the map. Directions to other exhibits should be clearly marked and noted with some signs. (B-V, diary) The galleries, rooms, weren't well-marked. It was confusing. I really didn't know which gallery I was walking through at times. (Ch-NV) I do think room numbers could be located in more obvious places if one must follow the given floor plan. (Cl-V) Invitation to the room and instructions on what is inside the room, a general overlay on what to expect when you walk in [would be helpful]. (Cl-V) I found it frustrating because I still say they don't mark things well enough in that museum. (P-V)
Maps are confusing and difficult to follow.	I was disappointed that the areas weren't more clearly marked. The map was not a lot of help either. I came up the elevator instead of the stairs and I had a time orienting myself to where I was. (De-V)

PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS AND PRESENTATION

Physical surroundings and presentation affect the museum experience.

The building itself is important.

- ***It creates an atmosphere.***
- ***It influences the way participants experience the objects.***
- ***It differentiates the museum from other attractions.***
- ***It may be viewed as a work of art itself.***
- ***It may be perceived as imposing and intimidating.***

It's just an experience you go through, not necessarily the art, but what you're seeing, the grounds, the building, the environment, which you don't see at other museums. (G-V)

I think the grounds were done that way to be part of the art. (G-NV)

I think the Art Institute is a great work of art itself... with its two huge lions etched in concrete or stone, its huge beautiful doors, its beautiful skylight windows on the second floor. It is truly a priceless work of art, of culture, education, beauty, and wonder. (Ch-V)

Building is a work of art itself. (P-NV, diary)

Exterior of building uninviting. (S-V)

I think it's just a cold building. It's nothing fun to look at. (P-NV)

At some museums, especially The J. Paul Getty Museum, participants' "top-of-mind" images focus on the museum's exterior, grounds, and setting.

If it didn't have one piece of art in it, it would still be worth the trip because the building is so magnificent. (G-V)

I also like the surroundings more than the art. (G-V)

I just think of the outside. I think it's a real neat building. (De-V)

It's really utterly splendid. It's the kind of building that you really don't see anything comparable to in this country or abroad in terms of architecture. (P-V)

My image of the art museum is the building itself. When I think of the art museum, I always think of the building, never even the collections inside.... I think of it as solid and gray and small. (S-V)

I actually love the building.... To walk down the steps, to view the fountains, to walk around the area of the fountains. (Cl-V)

The grounds have attracted me all my life. I just feel that the building shouldn't be separated from what's inside of it. It's part of the whole package. You can take out the pictures from the museum. But when you do and you put them in another setting, I think they lose something. (Cl-V)

It's almost like a medieval castle that's been revived.... When you go inside, it's almost too contemporary for the exterior.... I've never liked the way it was designed. (De-V)

It's not the typical American museum. It's an aura. You come into a private setting. You get behind those gates and you drive up that drive and you're in another world. (G-V)

The people whom I had talked to before I went there had all said that the grounds were fabulous. They understated the case severely. I though they were absolutely magnificent. (G-NV)

I have always been thrilled every time I looked at it, even from the outside. (P-V)

First-time and repeat visitors notice the installations. They comment on the architecture, size of rooms, color of walls, juxtaposition and choice of objects, and frames of paintings.

You weren't allowed to walk around *The Fire Next Time.* A piece of sculpture like that, that's very important. (Bk-NV)

The color of the walls [in the Renaissance galleries] did not enhance [the] artwork. (NGA-V)

Presentation not particularly interesting or imaginative. (S-V, diary)

No doubt the jade... was exquisite, but with so many in each case, it was tough for me to appreciate their beauty. I probably would have viewed the collection longer if they had been displayed one or two in a case. (S-NV, diary)

Deep red wall covering in this gallery [18] enhances the mood of elegance and reverence conveyed by the deeply religious subject matters. (Cl-V, diary)

I think the museum should be commended on the [second] floor. It shows the free style of the Indians.... It was well-arranged. (De-V)

Proper lighting is important. Insufficient lighting detracts from enjoyment of an exhibit.

Some places were very dark and you couldn't really even see the paintings. (Bk-V)

[The jade] was my favorite room to walk through with all the beautiful natural light, the small windows and everything. It really brightened things up. (S-NV)

Reflection of ceiling lights makes it difficult to see pictures without glare. (B-V, diary)

I had the feeling that the lighting wasn't right.... Maybe it was just too flat. It needed a lot more light on the ceiling coming down. (Cl-V, diary)

Period rooms are liked because they provide a feeling for the era and take visitors back in time.

The Egyptian museum, I thought, could have had more feeling of being in old Egypt or a pyramid. (Bk-V)

When you go into a room and it's, in essence, there as you might [have seen] it, as opposed to isolated pieces, to me you get that feeling of going back in time. (G-V)

Each room [in the Reves Wing] was really set up to show off the antiquity. I could have spent a day with this collection. It is like walking into another world. (D-NV)

I loved the Japanese section. Their artwork is great—everything in such detail. For a time I forgot I was in Boston. It really felt like I was in a Japanese museum. (B-V)

[The Oak Hill rooms] were my favorite part of the museum. It was great to see all the furniture and paintings in natural settings as opposed to looking at them in glass cases. I could almost feel like I was in the living room of someone's house a couple of hundred years ago. (B-NV, diary)

I really was surprised by these [period] rooms. I had no idea that things were set up that way and I loved it. It gives you a better sense of the feeling of the art than having things set out by themselves. (De-NV)

I got the feeling for what [a Japanese tea house] must have been like. (P-NV)

COMMUNICATION OF BENEFITS

Art museums do an inadequate job of communicating their benefits to the public.

There is low awareness among the general public of the offerings and programs of museums.

You don't hear too much about it. (S-NV)

Also I don't think it gets that much publicity. I never hear it advertised. (G-NV)

I think if they had those [paintings by masters], we'd be more aware of it. They would exploit the fact a little more. (De-NV)

I don't think they advertise enough to let the people in the public know what is going on. (De-NV)

I don't know what they have up there. (S-NV)

What's going to excite me in there? What's going to get me in there? (Ch-NV)

As far as telling you they had all this extra stuff, I didn't even know it existed. (De-NV)

You're never really aware of what is new at the Getty [Museum] (G-NV)

The art museum doesn't promote itself. (P-NV)

Advertising is needed to generate awareness and dispel myths that museums are boring, stagnant places.

Somewhat stuffy, kind of standoffish, very rigid. You wouldn't want to take your kids and let your kids run around. They might touch something. Something [for which] you'd get all dressed up and take a leisurely Sunday afternoon. (G-NV)

You get the impression that nothing is going on in there to pull you in. There's no excitement associated with the building. No life. (Ch-NV)

One of the reasons I haven't gone is because basically it's not an exciting experience, unless there's something different there, something unusual like a specific exhibit that's on tour. (Cl-NV)

The word "museum" has a connotation to it. They expect to go in there and cough because of the dust. (Cl-V)

Let them know it's something more than just an art museum.... Tell them that there's history. (De-NV)

Many nonvisitors never considered visiting their city's art museum. Museums are victims of the "out of sight, out of mind" syndrome.

Nonexistent is the image. People don't think of it being an entity that is really even anything to go see. (D-NV)

People just don't think of going. It just doesn't occur to them. (B-NV)

I have no desire to go there. It never crossed my mind. (De-NV)

Nonvisitors in some cities were unaware that their city had an art museum or were not sure what type of museum it was.	I didn't even know there was a Brooklyn Museum. I asked what kind of museum it was. (Bk-NV) I'd never heard of it before. (S-NV)	I'd never heard of it. I thought, "They're going to show you how they refine oil or something. Are there oil drums there?" I didn't know. . . . I thought, "Why would anybody want to go there?" It seems like a ridiculous place. (G-NV) I have no idea what's in the Dallas Museum. (D-NV)
There is no motivation for nonvisitors to overcome their inertia and go to the museum.	There is nothing that excites just the casual person. . . . I was struck even more that this is not speaking to the community, "We really want you to come here. We have something exciting." (S-V) What's going to excite me in there? What's going to get me in there? (Ch-NV)	You don't take the time because there is no driving force to get you there. (Cl-NV) There's nothing that draws me there. (P-NV)
Repeat visitors perceive that collections are static.	You can go and see different things. . . . I'd never heard that before until I went. (G-NV) I felt gypped. . . . There's nothing new there. That's the stuff we had for years and years and years. (D-V)	I was there ten years ago and this time I saw the same stuff—nothing's changed. (Ch-NV)

EMPLOYEES

Participants have mixed reactions to guards and other employees.

Guards are intimidating and make some people feel they are under constant surveillance. This detracts from their enjoyment.

I have a complete lack of respect for the guards now. They really bothered me. They bothered me because I was there by myself and I was writing and every two seconds I turned around and someone was staring at me. (NGA-V)

The security. You felt like you were being watched. (De-NV)

They watch you like, "Well, what are you going to do next?" (T-V)

I was a little bit nervous when I walked in there. I thought, "Well, are they going to keep an eye on me while keeping an eye on the art?" (De-NV)

Every time an alarm went off somewhere, it was kind of distracting. (De-NV)

I felt like I was a suspicious person. (T-V)

I did feel uncomfortable when I was in the cloister alone and security followed me in there—it put a damper on the atmosphere. (T-V, diary)

There [were] always the security men following—that made me feel a little uneasy. (T-NV, diary)

First-time and repeat visitors to the Philadelphia Museum of Art and The J. Paul Getty Museum and repeat visitors in Denver and Boston are not intimidated. They said the guards are friendly and helpful.

Everyone has been really friendly. (De-V)

I found many, many guards who were very helpful with info and directions. (P-V)

It was nice to be greeted by people that seemingly really wanted you to be here and enjoy yourself. (G-V, diary)

The staff throughout the museum was polite, friendly, and helpful when asked. They were there if you needed them, but unobtrusive, which is nice and doesn't detract from your enjoyment. (B-V, diary)

Individual guards enhanced some participants' museum experiences by giving directions or volunteering information about specific objects.

The security person in there was a wealth of information and trivia facts about this exhibit. I talked to him for over an hour the first time I went there. (D-V, diary)

I was surprised at how knowledgeable the guards [were]. We asked a lot of questions of the guards and they were really helpful and very knowledgeable. I was really impressed. (G-V)

Interactions with unfriendly guards reinforce the image that museums are "snobbish" places.

Personally, there wasn't the friendliness there. There was one person there behind the desk on the right who didn't even bother saying hello or anything. (D-V)

The guards and information people make you feel put down if you ask questions. They answer in a snippy manner. (Ch-NV)

I tried talking with the guards.... They really didn't want to talk to [visitors]. (NGA-NV)

Employees at the museums in Chicago and Cleveland were not adequately informed about tours and special events.	I asked about tours. No one could give me a definite answer [about] when they were or if they were. (Ch-NV)	I think guards should be better informed of events that are happening. (Cl-V)
Employees at The National Gallery of Art and The Art Institute of Chicago did not know where specific exhibitions were located when asked by visitors.	I asked two guards about the Heinz [exhibition], and they didn't know what I was talking about. They couldn't tell me where to go. (NGA-NV)	Half the time I didn't know where I was and neither did the guards. (Ch-NV) I had the same problem when I asked for the Heinz [exhibition]. (NGA-V)

PART II

LISTENING TO VISITORS: THE FOCUS GROUP EXPERIMENT

Proceedings of a
Colloquium Held in
Phoenix, Arizona
November 15-18, 1989

WELCOME AND HOPES FOR THE COLLOQUIUM

Speakers: **Leilani Lattin Duke, Director, The Getty Center for Education in the Arts**
John Walsh, Director, The J. Paul Getty Museum

Summary of Remarks by Leilani Lattin Duke

After formally welcoming the focus group seminar participants, Leilani Lattin Duke spoke briefly on the context, goals, and expectations of the colloquium.

The seminar was the culmination of a two-year research and development experiment to which all of those present had contributed. This experiment involved the application of a research methodology drawn from other disciplines to the issue of museum visitors. The Getty Museum's involvement began almost ten years ago in a series of conversations with other museum professionals regarding museum education and the role that visitors play in the building of a collection. In that early stage, the Getty Museum randomly collected many impressions, opinions, and perceptions, but by 1984 it decided to take a more systematic approach to soliciting and documenting these attitudes and impressions. Two art educators, Elliot Eisner of Stanford University and Stephen Dobbs of San Francisco State University, were asked to interview twenty art museum directors and educational directors from around the country. Duke confessed that the initial selection of the twenty museums was made by John Walsh and herself on a "nonscientific" basis, with geographic distribution and varied commitment to museum education among their main criteria.

The eleven museums represented at the seminar were among the twenty that went through the initial interview process, which resulted in what became known as the "Eisner-Dobbs Report." This report, with its controversial findings and recommendations, provoked a great deal of discussion, consternation, and dialogue. It was followed by a 1985 meeting at The Toledo Art Museum, during which a smaller group of museum directors and educators examined the implications of the Eisner-Dobbs Report for the future of museum education in general. Duke pointed out that the Getty's own bias in favor of museum education stems from the conviction that this is one of the key responsibilities of any museum, one that should be shared among educators, directors, and curators.

After the release of the report, the Getty followed one of its main recommendations and inaugurated a residential seminar program at Stanford University for educators, directors, and curators. By the end of the first summer, however, it was clear that this approach was not effective, and the eleven participants were asked to suggest alternative strategies during the year that followed. After nine months of meetings and brainstorming, the group came up with the idea of using "focus group research" methodology, which had been used previously by some history museums and a few art museums. These institutions recommended the leadership of Alan Newman, who successfully managed to overcome the Getty Museum's reservations about the applicability of his methods to the problems of museum professionals. Happily, the outcome seems to have been a positive and interesting experience for many of the participants, and Newman's report has provided some provocative and valuable insights.

Duke expressed her pleasure that so many of the project participants could be present for this final phase of the focus group project. She then introduced John Walsh, Director of the Getty Museum and her partner in the present undertaking.

Summary of Remarks by John Walsh

Prior to the focus group seminar, there had never been such an important group of directors, educators, and curators assembled to discuss museum audiences, John Walsh began. It was his hope that all would leave the seminar feeling that their time together was well spent and that the important questions had been addressed.

Commenting pointedly on the seminar setting, a resort in the "suburban desert" of Arizona, Walsh speculated that while the "bogus Spanish baroque" style of the surrounding buildings might cause museum professionals to shudder, most of the 250-odd museum visitors who participated in the project would find it quite splendid. They might even find it more appealing than the "real thing" as seen at San Juan Capistrano and be completely untroubled by its "historical mish-mash." History is becoming an increasingly vague concept, particularly among the less sophisticated members of museum audiences, who care less and less about the distinction between authentic objects and modern copies. It is particularly interesting to hear so many visitors express their genuine pleasure in the reassuring historical associations they discovered in the museum environment, a set of associations they may find just as easily in the faulty historicism of a luxury hotel.

Walsh believed that the latter environment underscores how wide the gap is between the audiences that the museum professional "plays to" and the audiences that are really out there.

Walsh's own experience of the focus group project was exciting, exhilarating, disturbing, and, finally, moving. He and his colleagues at the Getty became attached to the people "on the other side of the one-way window" and came to appreciate their lively, unpretentious, heartfelt manner. Walsh will never forget the African-American electrician who said that while his daily life was harsh, pressured, and hectic, the visit to the museum gave him peace, a space where he could "listen to the music in his heart." This testimony gave the Getty professionals a new respect for the visitor who does not come to the museum to learn, but to have an experience. Another visitor, a schoolteacher, provided a pungent critique of the museum experience with his description of the "culture shuffle," the dancelike series of movements one makes in shuffling from painting to painting, with an occasional lunge and bow to read a label before moving on. Another telling insight came from a Filipino woman who found in the pairing of Oriental porcelains and nineteenth-century French gilt mounts an artistic analogy and historical antecedent for her own hybrid identity as a Westernized Asian.

Walsh feels that most museums, including his own, have a long way to go before realizing their potential to attract and delight audiences and bring them back for repeat visits. In light of the fact that so many studies conclude that museums do not do enough for their audiences, an important task for the colloquium is to find out why this situation has been accepted for so long. One hypothesis is that museum directors and curators are out of touch with the visitor's experience, leaving the museum educator with little chance of addressing visitors' needs. The meeting in Toledo two years ago provided a small glimpse of the advantages of the team approach to the responsibility of attracting and holding the interest of museum audiences. One goal of this meeting was to test this approach and to learn whether it really works. Another goal was to share the experiences and insights of the focus group at the participating institutions and to see how those insights have affected subsequent planning and procedures. For Walsh's team at the Getty, the point of the gathering was to pick up practical advice as well as to gain a general overview.

Another goal was to discover the relationship between the information offered by the museum and the pleasure experienced by the average visitor, since it was clear from the focus group research that many of those interviewed were "hungry for information" about the works they saw. Many museum professionals are still squeamish about dispensing information, believing that the unmediated encounter is the most meaningful approach to a work of art and that this may be diminished by attempts to "account for" a work. This very complex and difficult issue was one that Walsh hoped would be tackled in the forthcoming sessions.

Walsh's final hope for the colloquium was that the dialogue resulting from it would be continued among curators, directors, and educators. He noted that his own work had benefited greatly from the discussions of the last few years, and he believes that ultimately these discussions will be of great benefit to museum audiences, who, in the last analysis, are the people who really count.

WHAT DID THE FOCUS GROUPS REVEAL?

Moderator: Katharine C. Lee, Deputy Director, The Art Institute of Chicago
Speaker: Alan Newman, President, Alan Newman Research
Discussants: James N. Wood, Director, The Art Institute of Chicago
Danielle Rice, Curator of Education, Philadelphia Museum of Art
Roger Mandle, Deputy Director, The National Gallery of Art

Summary of Remarks by Katharine C. Lee

Everyone present at this session had experienced at his or her home institution the transformation resulting from a closer familiarity with the needs and opinions of the public, Katharine Lee began. The museum professionals at The Art Institute of Chicago entered into the focus group process just after moving into a renovated building, and Lee recalled how intense and surprising the first meetings were for everyone involved. One curator, whose special project was the labeling of paintings, was surprised to learn that many ordinary art historical terms were causing problems for the public. He concluded that it would be no great sacrifice to use more familiar words, such as *cherub* for the more usual art historical designation *putto*. This led to his contacting the museum education department and suggesting that they contribute to the process of label writing, a procedure that is usually considered a curatorial prerogative.

Lee wishes that she could have accompanied Alan Newman through the entire interview process, so that she would have had the benefit of listening to everyone, visitors and museum professionals alike. Over the years, the focus group project has become a touchstone and point of reference for the Art Institute staff, an experience that all value very highly, and Lee was convinced that all present would welcome Alan Newman's final insights into their shared experience.

Summary of Remarks by Alan Newman

Back in late September, Alan Newman had begun to wonder what he could possibly say to make a genuine contribution to this conference. Most of those present had attended eight hours of visitor focus groups and three to four hours of staff group discussions. Most had read or had written numerous staff memoranda on the groups, watched hours of videotaped presentations, and read the summary reports on each museum. Likely, most had read the final report on the plane on the way to the conference. Nevertheless, it was gratifying to finally meet face to face with the participants in the project, which has been a highlight of the past several years.

It has been more than two years since the first meeting took place in Washington with Leilani Lattin Duke, Kent Lydecker, and Danielle Rice to discuss the applicability of focus group research to the issue of museum visitors. At that time, his firm, Alan Newman Research, was a ten-year-old market research company that drew most of its business from the travel, tourism, and leisure industries, including Walt Disney Productions, Mystic Seaport, and Colonial Williamsburg. The company's emphasis has always been on studying the visitors to these attractions, finding out who they are, where they live, and how they experience the attractions. Duke, Lydecker, and Rice initially were interested in focus group methodology because they saw it as an active, participatory process whereby museum professionals could learn about the visitors they serve by interacting with them. As most participants were aware, the first groups were conducted in Chicago late in 1987 and served as a successful introductory excursion into the roles, problems, and goals of museum professionals. Similar groups were then scheduled at ten other museums around the country during the following two years.

Newman proposed that rather than repeat what might be familiar material for everyone, he would review the project's initial objectives, discuss the focus group method, and summarize the findings that were common to each of the participating museums. He began with the program's goals and objectives, noting that from the outset the emphasis had been on *process* rather than *product*. Beyond evaluating the appropriateness of the focus group method for studying art museum visitors, the project sought to stimulate interdisciplinary communication among museum professionals. The quality of dialogue generated at the conference would be an indicator of how well this objective had been met. Other, more specific project objectives included the identification of staff expectations and assumptions about the museum visitor's experience and the identification of public expectations and whether or not they were met. Meeting these objectives involved the comparing and contrasting of visitor and staff expectations as well as an analysis of the educational insight that visitors gained from museum visits. In the course of this undertaking, the professional participants discovered that focus groups were a useful alternative to more passive quantitative methods of data collection and that the participatory process resulted in an exceptionally rich body of material.

Newman confessed that at first he found focus group methodology to be fuzzy and imprecise compared to the quantitative technique in which he had been trained, and initially he regarded it as a form of "mother-in-law" research. He later discovered that mothers-in-law are often appropriate and useful sources of information. Essentially, focus groups are impressionistic and qualitative studies, and unlike numerical surveys, which provide information that is projectable to a larger population, focus groups provide insights into the attitudes, values, and opinions of consumers. The results are neither projectable nor classifiable as correct or incorrect; their usefulness depends on the skill and analytic ability of those who collect the data. Participants are selected randomly according to agreed-upon characteristics, but not according to any strict statistical criteria. Individuals selected then take part in a group discussion with ten or eleven others, plus a moderator who directs the conversation according to an outline developed with the help of the client. The group discussions are held in special conference rooms that contain two-way mirrors and audio and videotape equipment, so that clients can observe and record the proceedings.

As a qualitative research method, focus groups have certain features that are of particular interest to the Getty Center for Education in the Arts. For instance, they stress insight and understanding, which are essential in meeting visitor expectations at museums. Additionally, the groups involve the staff as participants, and the observation process is an effective "team-building" activity. Finally, the results of the focus group process are easily understood and readily believed because they come directly from the interviewees themselves.

Two types of focus groups were used for the project: consensus groups and external focus groups. The consensus groups consisted of museum staff who worked on developing a consensus on the objectives of the project. Their agreed-upon objectives were to achieve support for the project, to identify the types of visitors or "consumers" that would be selected for the project, to design the assignment that visitors would be asked to complete while at the museum, and, finally, to identify the staff's view of the educational and experiential role of the museum. The external focus groups at each institution were arranged in pairs: one group made up of visitors to the museum, the other consisting of nonvisitors, or people who had not visited a museum since childhood. In all cases, both groups were given the same set of assignments. They first held a preliminary discussion of their expectations about a museum visit, and then visited galleries designated by the staff. No orientation was provided other than a gallery map, and the group was asked to keep a diary of their visit. A follow-up group discussion was held to compare actual experiences with expectations.

Newman reviewed some of the key findings of the eleven-museum study. The consensus groups confirmed that museum professionals want visitors to have a meaningful experience and to leave the museum with the desire to return. Unanimously, the groups felt that individuals should experience museums in whatever way they find most meaningful, a concept that, according to Newman, resulted in vague staff expectations. However, there were some more specific expectations that were common to many in the consensus groups. Among these were that some objects would arouse intellectual curiosity and inspire additional learning, that some objects would provoke an "emotional connection" with the visitor, and that the museum visit would instill a sense of community pride. Consensus group members hoped that visitors would see the museum as a restful oasis in a hectic world and that they would feel welcome and comfortable. Additionally, some staff members hoped that visitors would be conscious of the fact that they were seeing *original* and historically specific works of art and that they would be struck by the uniqueness of the particular museum and its collection.

Newman pointed out that although many of the staff expectations had seemed vague and intangible, visitors used much the same language in articulating their expectations. Visitors found the museum experience meaningful and rewarding, and they wished to return. Their experiences were quite individual and were expressed in a wide variety of sentiments. Many were conscious of the variety and uniqueness of the museum's objects and were struck by the size, complexity, and beauty of the collection as a whole. Many participants commented verbally or through their diaries on a special emotional connection they felt with a particular object. Almost all remarked on the educational dimension of their visits, with both first-time and repeat visitors noting that they felt they had expanded their understanding of and interest in history or culture. Many visitors were appreciative of the calm and restful atmosphere of the physical surroundings—the galleries, the buildings and grounds—and cited this as a key reason for their return visits.

Newman pointed out that return visitors to museums were able to approach their subsequent visits with a sense of "comfort and control," while first-time visitors expressed some anxiety and intimidation when identifying their expectations about a museum visit. Nonvisitors tended to assume that they would not understand or appreciate the art objects, which would be unfamiliar to them. They believed that regular museum-goers are knowledgeable and less likely to ask for help. Many believe that art museums are for the upper classes and that people dress formally for visits. For these reasons, many people do not think that museum visits are appropriate family activities. Among the other reasons that people cite for not visiting museums are lack of time and interest, inconvenient locations, and, most significantly, lack of awareness.

The latter was cited by both visitors and nonvisitors as a major reason for not visiting museums. Although many from both groups were aware of the heavily advertised "blockbuster" exhibitions, most knew little else about permanent collections or program offerings. This lack of awareness contributed to a loss of visitors to more competitive attractions, such as science museums, zoos, and theaters.

It is encouraging that most first-time visitors found their initial experience with the museum much better than they expected: less intimidating, more interesting, and more engaging. In fact, the experiences of both first-time and repeat visitors exceeded expectations so much that many said they would return soon. Nevertheless, all visitors wanted to improve the quality of future visits and to discover ways of overcoming problems of orientation and information gathering. The major gap between staff expectations and visitor experiences were manifested in three particular areas: orientation, information, and direction.

Orientation, a problem at all eleven museums, must be addressed in order to overcome intimidation and to promote learning. Both repeat and first-time visitors expressed a desire to be steered to important objects and to have easy access to information about those objects. Many first-time visitors were unsure about the originality of the works on display, and some assumed that many were copies. Most wanted to know more about the museum in general, its offerings and programs, and found orientation films interesting, informative, and helpful. A common complaint was that the availability of tours, talks, and programs was not more prominently displayed. More information was a primary demand of both visitors and nonvisitors, and most agreed that their appreciation of objects was closely linked to greater knowledge. Many of the complaints about the lack of available information centered on labeling: labels were felt to be too small and to contain an insufficient amount of information. Participants suggested that an expanded labeling system would include information on the artist's life, the subject and its historical significance, the school or style, the cultural and historical context, the technique or media, and what makes the object an important work of art. Such labeling is particularly requested for the art that is least familiar, such as non-Western works. Visitors expressed appreciation for brochures, self-guided tours, audio and video presentations and slide shows, and any information that promotes learning and reduces intimidation.

One of the most frequently cited visitor complaints was that the layout and organization of museums are confusing. This is particularly problematic since the physical setting—the building and grounds—is considered a key component of a positive museum experience. Visitors complained of getting lost in galleries, of rooms being insufficiently distinct, and of guards who too often were unfriendly or unhelpful when asked for assistance. In fact, the presence of guards was often given as a source of increased intimidation for many first-time visitors.

In summary, Newman reiterated that orientation, information, and direction were the keys to an improved museum experience. He hoped that in his talk he had provided a sense of the concerns and attitudes of staff and visitors, as well as an idea of the richness of the data that has been collected during the course of this project. In two years, more than 220 visitors and 115 museum professionals have engaged in more than 132 hours of focus groups. Many of those present had participated in these sessions and, in so doing, may have identified issues and concerns of their own in addition to those noted by Newman. This is one of the strengths of the focus group process, and Newman encouraged all the participants to share their unique insights with each other in the days ahead.

Summary of Remarks by James N. Wood

A specialist on twentieth-century art and director of the recent renovation and redesign of The Art Institute of Chicago facility, James Wood began by stating his conviction that the focus group methodology works very well. His group came out of the project with an unprecedented understanding of its audience. Additionally, the project had the gratifying effect of bringing the staff together. Wood was pleased that the Art Institute had included a trustee in its group, but in hindsight he wishes that more trustees had been involved as a way of bridging the gap in perception and understanding between trustees and staff. At the close of the project the Art Institute found it had a strong trustee advocate for the less obvious, but no less important, functions of the museum.

Wood found the focus group technique to be very effective on the symbolic level. The experience of observing from behind the two-way mirror was uncomfortable, and yet that physical separation, with its implications of voyeurism and superiority, dramatized the gap that persists between staff and audience. In addition, a great deal of specific information was generated by the project. Wood cited the Art Institute's recent exhibition of seventh- to fourteenth-century Japanese religious objects, to which Japanese priests came every morning to perform religious ceremonies. This procedure was not instigated as part of an educational agenda, but to satisfy the requirements of the lender. The result was that ancient, foreign objects were brought to life through an authentic contextualization. Although not part of the Institute's initial plans, this was one of the most highly commended aspects of the exhibition.

The Art Institute group also learned that the architecture of their facility is something of which visitors are highly conscious and to which they respond. The effects of buildings and light are noticed and articulated by visitors with precision and sensitivity. Of particular importance to the museum experience is "focus": when visitors were given an assignment to study a particular object or gallery, their appreciation of the work was heightened. In this sense, Wood concluded, less is more. The question raised by the focus groups is, in essence, What is the museum's responsibility to its public? As long as the public remains anonymous and dehumanized, this question does not arise, but as visitors become individuals, the issue of responsibility becomes immediate, even urgent.

The focus groups showed Wood that directors and curators tend to see acquisition and presentation as the chief priorities of the museum, overshadowing education, appreciation, and interpretation. In the past decade the Art Institute has been engaged in rethinking the problems of the physical setting, the presentation, and the installation of works of art. But even though these problems are important and, with enough money, solvable, Wood cautioned that perfecting the physical setting is not the true mission of an art museum. More important, as indicated by the focus groups, is increasing staff awareness of and respect for the audience. Wood's own recent experiences with controversial art, including pieces that use obscenity and those that place revered objects, such as the American flag, in challenging contexts, showed him that the public, when given the opportunity to study an issue, usually will make the right decision. The focus groups reinforced this positive impression of public sensibilities. They also helped Wood shift his priorities and gave him and his staff a clearer view of how they could achieve educational goals that previously had seemed vague or out of reach. The focus groups did not, in the final analysis, provide any prescriptive recommendations. As Alan Newman pointed out, however, the *process* was the most important aspect of the project.

Wood concluded with some specific questions and observations. First, he suggested that although the art world may have entered a "post-collecting" age, the training of staff members is somewhat limited to acquisition and connoisseurship. Despite today's incredibly active art market, which suggests that collecting is still a dominant activity, Wood feels that the reality is quite different: he views transactions, rather than accumulation, as the most important current trend. If this is the case, museums may be facing a crisis of purpose. Collecting and building a collection, which have traditionally defined the museum's public service responsibilities, have fostered a paternalistic attitude toward the public. The challenge for the future may be to preserve the museum's traditional authority while encouraging public confidence in exercising personal tastes. Here the focus groups demonstrated the sophistication of the general public and the ability of individuals to make value judgments. The question for museum professionals is: Have their presentations and educational efforts done little more than endorse pre-established judgments, or are they contributing to the development of a critical audience? For Wood, the museum professional's ultimate satisfaction should be the knowledge that the museum is contributing to the public's ability to develop its own taste.

Summary of Remarks by Danielle Rice

Commenting that she came from a museum (the Philadelphia Museum of Art) whose patron saint was Marcel Duchamp, one of whose goals was to surprise himself as much as possible, Danielle Rice said she would address the focus group experience in terms of the different ways in which it surprised her.

In today's world, people have become adept at focusing narrowly on the information they feel they need while filtering out most of what passes by them in the vast flow of data that one encounters daily. Real learning, however, is a transformative process, whereby information is absorbed, assimilated, and compared to one's "inner framework," which it consequently affects and changes. The focus groups generated a learning experience that was not easily generalized or compared with other, more quantifiable experiences. Yet for Rice, the written reports of the focus groups, although admittedly accurate, were disappointing in that they did not encompass and express the richness of the learning experience itself, which is revealed in details and subtleties that are difficult to communicate.

For Rice, one of the biggest surprises was that visitors have more contact with museum educators and docents than quantitative "through-the-gate" studies had indicated. Most of the visitor groups that she observed mentioned that they had had contact with a museum educator at some level and that they considered that contact important. Another surprise was that many visitors cited teaching and inspiring their children as a primary motivation for museum visits. Although Rice already was aware that family groups constitute a major portion of the weekend museum audience, she appreciated the personal confirmation of the statistical fact. Additionally, it became clear that many visitors had acquired the habit of museum-going as schoolchildren during school-sponsored visits. This made Rice aware of the degree to which she had become needlessly discouraged and pessimistic regarding the impact of educators on the museum audience. One of the difficulties of being a museum educator, as opposed to a teacher in an academic setting, is that there is little opportunity to build a relationship over time with one's students, which means that museum educators cannot directly witness the effects of their efforts. After the focus groups, Rice found herself looking forward to further investigation of the effects of various programs on visitors and their attitude toward the museum.

With nonvisitors, a major surprise was the evident power of the first museum experience. Rice related an anecdote about a truck driver in his midtwenties whose wife was in the hospital after delivering their third child. Through most of the session, he appeared closed off to the focus group experience and identified his preferred pastimes as fishing, hunting, and spending time with his children. Lack of time and interest were his chief reasons for never having visited the museum. When asked what he expected to find at a museum, he answered "dusty paintings and sculptures," and his anticipated response was "boredom." Rice assumed that his disengagement and lack of interest could not be overcome. Oddly enough, this man spent more time in the museum than anyone else in the group, and he fell in love with a Dutch landscape exhibit that was not even part of his museum assignment. This man's story reminded Rice of the power that art objects have to inspire, move, and transform human beings.

Rice also was struck by the degree of confusion that exists on the part of nonvisitors as to the authenticity of the objects in museums. Clearly, it is difficult for many people to understand the significance of a "real" object as opposed to a copy, and Rice wonders why. She also wonders whether those people who think they are viewing copies in the museum believe that the "real" art objects are stored elsewhere or that they no longer exist. Another surprise was the amazement of nonvisitors at finding more than painting and sculpture in the museum—at finding decorative arts and furniture in the period rooms, for example. Possibly because furniture is more familiar to people than painting and sculpture, Rice found that many nonvisitors were particularly drawn to the decorative arts, yet most discounted that experience as being not aesthetic or not art-related.

Admittedly, Rice was uncomfortable to find that nonvisitors, after their first museum experiences, expressed feelings very similar to staff expectations. She wondered why they had so readily internalized the attitudes and perceptions that museum professionals expected and hoped to hear; she wanted to know how the process occurred, and she suspected that some degree of "brainwashing" might be linked to the institutional setting and the received dogma that "art is good for you." To what degree were the non-visitors reacting to their own relief at having endured the museum experience, and will they actually follow through on their stated intention to return to the museum?

Perhaps the biggest surprise for Rice and her colleagues was their own reaction to one particular focus group member. This "museum groupie" took part in all the institution's lectures and programs; she had a condescending attitude toward the other members of the group and was constantly defending the museum from any and all criticism. Despite the fact that in many respects this woman was the ideal visitor, the staff strongly disliked her. Instead, they prized a more critical attitude in themselves and in the visitors. Another pleasant surprise, this one resulting from the consensus focus groups, was the benefit of having museum staff articulate their hopes and aspirations concerning their work, a process that Rice feels should be repeated on a regular basis to help staff recognize their individual goals. As a whole, the focus group process was most helpful in giving museum educators and their fellow staff members a personal and intimate connection with the people whom they serve. What was learned was that, indeed, it is possible to fall in love with one's visitors and to respect and value their wishes, desires, and perceptions.

Summary of Remarks by Roger Mandle

Roger Mandle began by observing that the setting of the colloquium provided a kind of microcosm of the visitor's experience in entering a museum for the first time: the environment is disorienting, the maps are only partially helpful, and finding one's way to the breakfast table is a daunting experience. He emphasized the importance of the focus groups as opportunities for museum professionals to communicate not only among themselves but also with the public. Although the sessions included many emotional moments during which the museum professionals' fondest hopes and aspirations for the visitors were realized, they also revealed a number of frustrations as staff members realized that some of their most strenuous efforts had neither been noticed nor appreciated. For the staff at the National Gallery, it was particularly important to have a chance to discuss expectations and attitudes toward both the visitors and the museum's role as caretaker of works of art. One of the intangible benefits of the focus groups was simply getting the entire staff around a table to test their assumptions and expectations and, ultimately, to fuse them into a coherent reassertion of the museum's mission.

Although museum professionals may prefer to see the objects in their care as "beacons of immutability," change is inevitable. The focus groups shed light on the changing nature of the museum audience and the historical particularity of individual responses. It is possible that audiences today have different expectations than audiences will have fifty years from now. Initiating and continuing the process of discussion is an important aspect of team building and of forging a consensus among museum staff. Ongoing discussion also is key to discovering and testing assumptions and perceptions about the museum's relationship to the outside world, some of which turned out to be mistaken.

The focus groups—which are still in progress—have resulted in several important projects at the National Gallery. For example, the museum was made painfully aware of major problems in the labeling system. Because very little information can be contained on the labels themselves, the museum is experimenting with a program that provides additional information *off* the frame, through handout sheets.

A statistical survey of visitors is also being prepared to supplement the findings of the focus groups. There is too little information on the more than seven million annual visitors to the National Gallery. Clearly, attracting visitors is not a problem. To serve the museum audience better, it is essential to know who visits, why, and what their expectations are. In addition, the National Gallery is planning a new orientation and focus gallery in the west building, and major changes are under way in the area of guard training and security. New signage and an improved calendar format will help the flow of information, and docent demography is being studied in recognition of the fact that docents serve as important role models for the museum audience. Finally, and most important, the institution is working to improve communications among staff and trustees, particularly in regard to museum education issues.

Noting that personally he was more interested in the long-term and indirect aspects of the focus group research, Mandle observed that the research has inspired new and more carefully planned processes for exhibition and education programs, so that resources are not needlessly wasted. The museum is now more conscious of its educational mission, its responsibilities to visitors, and the fact that its traditional priorities are undergoing significant changes. The focus groups have been an important experience for the entire staff, and they continue to engender a strong sense of teamwork and mutual commitment.

Mandle reiterated Wood's observation that, in an age in which few museums can compete in the marketplace, collecting is becoming less important. For those museums that already have great collections, the emphasis must shift to making the best use of what they have rather than filling in whatever gaps may remain. Long-term museum professionals all recognize that works of art are complicated, multidimensional objects that provoke a variety of experiences. But it is becoming clearer that communities also are multidimensional—as complicated and demanding as works of art. In this age of scarce resources, museums must assume a role formerly filled by other educational institutions in the community, institutions that once had the responsibility for preparing visitors for the museums. It is no longer safe to assume that visitors are prepared for the kind of experience they expect to have in a museum. Museums must serve as cultural centers that move visitors through a process of inquiry and experience, at whatever level they are prepared for, to a greater appreciation and understanding of their world. The crisis is not unlike that faced in the last decades by universities and churches, which have been forced to reexamine their traditional roles and assumptions in light of the unprecedented strains and extraordinary conditions of contemporary life.

Museums must help people develop the critical sensibility they need to function as full participants in the world community. In celebrating works of art, museums are celebrating the achievements of the human spirit. The importance of small institutions in these efforts must not go unrecognized; in many cases, they have been very successful in developing profound and lasting relationships with schools and other institutions within the community. For those who have been in the museum business for many years, the training of future generations of professionals, and the communication of these key responsibilities, should be a top priority.

Summary of General Discussion

Katharine C. Lee solicited comments and questions from the session participants on the presentations of the speaker and the discussants.

Anne d'Harnoncourt asked **Roger Mandle** about the similarities and differences between the first meeting in Toledo in 1987 and the focus group sessions. Mandle noted that although in general there were more similarities than differences between the two groups, one striking difference was that in the latter sessions someone asked why the National Gallery was called "the National Gallery" and what the name really meant. This question caught the staff unaware and made them think very carefully about the museum's mission and the way in which the staff members regard the National Gallery as both a local and an international institution.

D'Harnoncourt observed that she and her colleagues at the Philadelphia Museum of Art recognize that the museum and the city simultaneously are both related and unrelated, a situation that has an important bearing on their thinking about the collections, the facility, and the public. She asked **Alan Newman** why the differences between specific museums in specific cities seemed so minor in the final report. Newman suggested that the similarities in visitor experience may stem from the common training and mentality of the museum professionals who guide and arrange those experiences, with the result that specific regional factors lose impact. When **Richard Brettell** asked if Newman was implying that since museum professionals were all alike, the visitors' experiences were alike, Newman admitted that essentially he felt that to be true.

During his own move from Chicago to Dallas, **Brettell** was struck by the fact that the former city, perceiving itself as having a tradition and a history, had a concomitant concern with the building as an architectural experience, while Dallas seems to see itself as completely new, as a city without a past. Because a large number of museum visitors in Dallas are not repeat visitors, or even residents, but tourists attending conventions, Brettell asked how an institution could best serve the educational needs of a tourist audience. He presumed that this issue was of even more significance to such institutions as the National Gallery and wondered how the focus group methodology could be adjusted to study that problem.

Newman responded that tourists are a very difficult group to study, even for the major theme parks, which draw tourists almost exclusively. Because of their tight time constraints, it is particularly difficult to get tourists to spend two or three hours answering detailed questions about their experiences. There is the possibility of talking to people after they have returned home, but that is far less satisfactory. At the Getty, Newman and his colleagues tried to select a group of people who were newcomers to the Los Angeles area with the idea that their responses would more closely match those of tourists.

Lee noted that Chicago's nonvisitor group was noticeably different from that of Philadelphia, for example, in that the Chicago nonvisitors were far more negative. She wondered if a particular group dynamic had evolved that encouraged a negative response and to what extent such a dynamic might have affected the final results. **Kent Lydecker** acknowledged that there may be a stronger sense of "guilt" among city residents who are nonvisitors than there would be among tourists and that with larger museums in older cities this sense of guilt may frame a larger set of expectations that are revealed in the group process.

Neil Harris wondered why so few comparative references were made by visitors to other museums and why visitors would not think of comparing their experience of one museum with a prior experience in another city. **Danielle Rice** noted that some of the more well-traveled participants in the focus groups had visited museums abroad and in other cities as tourists, but had never thought of visiting their local museum. She believes that there may be many potential visitors who consider themselves museum-goers, but who have overlooked the local or lesser-known institutions. **Bret Waller** and **William J. Burback** pointed out that in their groups they had found similar examples of nonvisitors who had been regular museum-goers while abroad or in another city, but never in their hometown, because they presumed that the local museum would be disappointing by comparison. Burback noted that in his groups both visitors and nonvisitors had frequently discussed museum comparisons.

Barbara Martin recalled that there was only one member of her visitor group who was a museum member and seemed a frequent museum-goer. She wondered if there was a consistent mix in the other groups of occasional and frequent visitors. **Newman** thought the groups were well mixed and fairly representative. **Anne Bromberg** noted that in Dallas several of the nonvisitors said they perceived Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York as having great museums that were worth the trouble to see, but that they had never been to the Dallas Museum of Art, and in some cases were not even aware that it existed. Most thought that it was unlikely that Dallas would have a major museum of the kind found in a larger city. After visiting the museum, these people were extraordinarily positive about their experience in a personal and perceptive way, in her opinion, even more so than the regular visitors. Bromberg felt that the visitors were markedly less enterprising and perceptive about the art they saw than the nonvisitors. In that sense it was daunting to realize that the people who identified themselves as frequent museum-goers were less interesting in their response to the art. **Lee** noted a similar experience in her visitor group with a committed museum-goer who was relatively unresponsive during the focus group sessions.

James N. Wood observed that perhaps these experiences suggest that the ideal would be to turn local residents into tourists in their own cities, with the freedom, curiosity, and critical distance that one exercises away from home. **Brettell** commented that the act of going to a museum is, in a sense, a form of vicarious travel. While some people dislike the experience of being in a strange place, others enjoy wandering around in an unfamiliar place; they derive a sense of pleasure and adventure from the experience. He suggested that although museums are frequently criticized for their indecipherable maps and unclear signage, it may not be totally negative that there are no distinct territories in a museum and that signs do not steer one through the space in a predetermined path. **Mandle** disagreed, insisting that people who enjoy wandering will continue to do so, but those who require more structure need help in acclimating themselves to the museum setting.

Noting that the Seattle Museum is located in a district heavily frequented by tourists, **Patterson Sims** pointed out that tourists are problematic visitors because all the educational work performed by museum staff is wasted on them. Tourists cannot be expected to go to lectures or take a long-term interest in the institution. However, one can expect the tourist to enjoy the museum as a site for musing and exploration, as a place to enjoy and get lost in. Unfortunately, museum professionals are convinced that the average visitor desperately wants to be guided and led through the facility. Sims wonders where museum educators will be if the tourist phenomenon becomes the dominant form of museum experience, a trend that would clearly contradict many of the findings of the focus group sessions. **Newman** suggested that there are two levels of experience at issue. On one level, people like to wander and lose themselves in a museum; tourists often prefer this type of experience. On another level, however, people realize that they are lost and want to find their way through. At that point, they begin to reach for guidance; if it is not there, their experience is marred.

Claudine Brown pointed out that for tourists a bad museum experience does not affect their civic pride. For residents it becomes something that one does not choose to share with others. For both tourists and resident visitors, attendance at other museums becomes a point of comparison, as it was for many in the focus groups in Seattle. Tourists bring a new frame of reference back to their home institutions, and that comparison is either positive or negative. Many visitors in the focus groups frequently mentioned the objects in the Seattle museum as a point of community pride. In particular, residents say they enjoy sharing *their* collection with tourists and out-of-town friends.

Bonnie Pitman-Gelles remarked that many of the focus group participants believed that the Seattle Art Museum would only contain works by Seattle artists. She was reassured somewhat to learn that some of the Getty Museum participants thought that they would see oil drums on display. She wondered how these impressions could be corrected and how information about collections could be better disseminated to the public. **Linda Downs** feels that this confusion is particularly acute in the twentieth-century collections. There is still a certain amount of antagonism and hostility on the part of visitors toward traditional forms of information, such as brochures and audiovisual presentations. People seem to feel that the information is tainted or false, that it misrepresents the work of art, unless it comes from the artist personally. **Rice** sees a paradox in this: on the one hand, visitors want more information; on the other, they question the information available to them. Downs added that while direct quotes from artists are acceptable, any form of interpretation is suspect, and the kind of interpretive brochures that are acceptable for fifteenth-century art may be unacceptable for twentieth-century art.

Returning to the tourist-versus-frequent-visitor issue, **Waller** noted that in year-long studies at the Getty Museum, the reasons for museum visitation fell into two categories: the aesthetic and the social. Aesthetic reasons were tied to the viewing of a particular object or exhibition. Social reasons included bringing the family together and meeting friends. Repeat visitors were more likely than first-time visitors to cite social reasons for their visits. He was not sure if that was a natural and understandable motive for visiting museums or if it represented a problematic trend.

Evan Turner felt that three different groups of people were being discussed. The first group, tourists, visits museums away from home. They use their time differently while at home. The second group comprises the nonvisitors, those who are clearly reachable and constitute a potential audience. Repeat visitors make up the third group. Turner feels that the interesting thing about Alan Newman's work is that it helps museum professionals concentrate their efforts on the first two groups, particularly on the second group. What has not been done yet is to look closely at the person who comes often. Turner is particularly concerned about this group because all the efforts to make the museum more accessible and interesting to the nonvisitor may have the side effect of making it boring or unchallenging for the frequent visitor. Department stores constantly change their interiors and displays to keep the experience fresh and stimulating for the frequent shopper, while museums lack the means to reinstall and change their exhibits every nine months.

In agreeing with Turner, **Lewis Sharp** admitted that his own primary concern is with the Denver Art Museum's 18,000 members, a remarkable number in a city of that size. Last week the museum held a focus group with members, and Sharp was unsettled by the lack of communication the museum professionals had with those people in the community who are most committed to the museum's existence. If the membership is not well served, the museum is not fulfilling its mission.

Burback posed a final question to Newman regarding the difficulty of communicating the focus group experience in written reports. Since the focus group phenomenon originated in the world of for-profit marketing, Burback wondered if for-profit businesses are more successful in communicating their findings to the larger corporate culture than museums are at communicating with their constituents. **Newman** responded that, although in the business world focus group questions and responses may be more clear-cut than in the museum world, the general mode of communication is similar in both realms. A key requirement of the focus group process is that participants and clients not accept the written results without question or analysis. The individual experiences of each museum professional will mediate the generalizations that wind up in the final summary, and it is this subjectivity and flexibility that distinguish the museum focus group project from a similar project in the for-profit sector.

HOW DO FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS RELATE TO OTHER RESEARCH?

Moderator: Bonnie Pitman-Gelles, Associate Director for Programs, Seattle Art Museum
Speaker: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Committee on Human Development, University of Chicago
Discussants: Richard Brettell, Director, Dallas Museum of Art
J. Kent Lydecker, Executive Director, Museum Education, The Art Institute of Chicago
David Curry, Curator of European and American Art, Denver Art Museum

Summary of Remarks by Bonnie Pitman-Gelles

Bonnie Pitman-Gelles opened the session by expressing her pleasure in introducing someone whose books she has read for many years. For twenty-five years, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has been researching a dimension of the museum visitor's mind that is not easily accessible to the museum professional: the way visitors experience art in their lives. Professor Csikszentmihalyi's initial research focused on artists and their perceptions and experiences as they created works of art, a subject that is particularly meaningful to those who devote their lives to the objects that artists create. Csikszentmihalyi's work augments the demographic studies and the focus groups by providing insights into how visitors experience their own interaction with the works of art. His published works include *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* and *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*; the first deals with how people achieve optimal experiences in their lives, and the second with how the objects of everyday life foster this experience. Forthcoming from Oxford University Press is his *The Art of Seeing*, which was prepared with the support of the Getty Trust.

Summary of Remarks by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

While admitting that he is not an expert on museums or their audiences, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi noted that he has long been engaged in researching art and creativity from the perspective of the producers of art and those who use and appreciate it. Csikszentmihalyi offered his impression that the present gathering was not the usual meeting of professionals, but was a rethinking and reevaluation of the mission and purpose of the art museum. He hoped that the meeting would produce a new vision for the future of the institutions represented.

Csikszentmihalyi described his own task as a more modest one: to discuss the museum visitor focus groups in light of his own research on the aesthetic experience of museum professionals and collectors and to compare the findings of the two studies. His initial impression was that the two studies, one focusing on professionals, the other on audiences, were complementary and mutually enlightening. However, before making a comparison, he wanted to provide a theoretical context for the analysis, one that would apply a social sciences perspective to the question of the function of art museums.

In addressing the issue of the museum's function in society, he drew a distinction between what he called *latent* and *manifest* functions. Manifest functions are the stated and explicit goals that institutions are expected to fulfill. Latent goals are likely to be discreetly ignored and left unacknowledged, either because they are too obvious or because they are slightly embarrassing. Nevertheless, without fulfilling their latent functions, most institutions would cease to exist.

Like other cultural institutions, museums must raise funds. To do so, they strive to maintain a worldly and sophisticated image that will enhance the status of donors, serve as a source of community pride, and attract tourists. This requires a certain amount of mystification, which means that museum professionals, like any cultural priesthood, must exaggerate the importance of their mission and veil it in an aura of profundity and mystery. Although these latent functions must be met if a museum is to survive, they are clearly not the sole reasons for its existence.

The two preeminent manifest goals of an art museum may be described as the preservation and restoration of the best examples of human craft, or *art*, and the use of art as the medium for communicating aesthetic experiences to visitors. It is probably true that historically the first task was considered the more important, while the second has gained in significance in recent decades. These two goals have the effect of setting up a tension in the staff structure of museums, as curators prioritize the acquisition and maintenance of objects and educators emphasize the communicative role of art. The function that most concerns this conference is the second manifest function of the art museum, the task of providing visitors with a unique and meaningful experience.

Museum professionals and visitors agree on some of the reasons why encounters with works of art can be meaningful and desirable. Csikszentmihalyi referred to a table charting the categories of experience most often cited by professionals and compared these to the categories described by visitors during the focus groups. Although the vocabularies are different, the general content is remarkably similar. Both groups describe aesthetic experience as having four major components: cognitive or intellectual, emotional, perceptual or sensual, and communicative. The degree to which people respond to any single category of experience depends on their backgrounds. Professionals and curators, particularly those with Ph.D.s, are likely to emphasize the cognitive dimension and be concerned with issues of provenance, attribution, and context. They see the artwork as an intellectual puzzle to be solved, an approach that is less salient to the general visitor. However, responses from lay audiences suggest that they would relate to this aspect of aesthetic experience given the requisite knowledge.

As a rule, visitors do not expect a major intellectual challenge from attending a museum; instead, most seek surprise, excitement, and escape from their everyday existence. More sophisticated viewers hope, additionally, to learn something significant about themselves in the expressive work of a fellow human being. The word *magic*, while it seldom appears in the data, is an appropriate description of what people hope to find.

Cognitive challenges, emotions, visual impact, and empathy are the conscious articulations of the aesthetic experience. But they are not the sum total of an experience with a work of art, which begins where awareness and conscious thinking end. Total immersion is the goal of both lay visitors and experts for their encounters with art, a type of optimal experience that Csikszentmihalyi terms "flow experience." This is a state of consciousness characterized by intense concentration bordering on oblivion, yet requiring complex mental or physical activity. Sports, meditation, religious ritual, and scientific investigation all provide some form of this experience, despite their differing contents. Csikszentmihalyi quoted Charles Lindbergh, who used the analogy of watching a play on stage to describe flying the *Spirit of Saint Louis* across the Atlantic. Similar concepts are employed by Navajo braves in describing the hunting of a deer or by Thai women describing their craft of rug-weaving. Encountering a work of art falls into this category of flow experience, one that "carries you along in time and place."

Csikszentmihalyi next compared an aesthetician's analysis of the criteria for aesthetic experience with the criteria identified for flow experiences derived from the study of rock climbers, chess masters, ballet dancers, and surgeons. In all cases, the experience is made possible by the active exercise of cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and communicative powers in meeting environmental challenges. These challenges require concentrated attention on a limited field and the exclusion of other concerns. Immersion in the moment frees the actor from ego-related concerns and from any preoccupation with the self. Yet, paradoxically, upon returning to normal life, the actor emerges with a greater sense of wholeness and integration, a stronger sense of self.

Having established the ways that skiing down a mountainside and looking at a painting are similar, the question remains, in what ways are they distinct? Clearly, different activities that provide the flow experience vary according to the challenges they present and the skills they require. The challenges of art are quite different from the physical challenges of rock climbing or skiing. Appreciating a work of art requires historical knowledge, emotional responsiveness, visual sophistication, and communicative empathy, many of the same processes through which an artwork is created. It is through the meshing of challenges and skills that the aesthetic flow experience occurs and the "magic" of art becomes actualized.

Historically, art museums evolved as the institutions of a homogeneous elite who shared educational levels, tastes, and backgrounds. Museums could assume a common symbolic matrix that encompassed both visitors and objects. The dramatic changes in ethnicity and educational standards have eliminated this traditional homogeneity, but, more important, museums themselves have democratized their focus and their mission and are attempting to engage a much larger constituency. The result has been a widening gap between art and its audiences.

Art museums, as the mediators of the aesthetic experience for the community, must find ways of bridging the gap between the challenge presented by the artwork and the skills that visitors bring to the museum. The focus groups provided some suggestions as to how this could be accomplished. The focus group report contained a list of major obstacles that audiences encountered during their museum visits, including lack of orientation, insufficient information about the specific work, confusing layouts and organization, intimidating employees, and lack of clear information from the museum about its offerings. Although this list of complaints may seem random, the elements actually fall into categories.

It is difficult to become involved in any activity unless one has a clear goal, yet most museum visitors do not know what they should be doing or what they should be looking for in a work or art. The self-consciousness that results effectively blocks any but the most superficial experience of the art. Consequently, orientation is a key to facilitating the aesthetic experience. But identifiable goals are of little use without skills. To fully experience art one must have some knowledge of it, and lacking the time to gain that knowledge firsthand through looking, visitors want distilled information about a work. They feel that if they knew more about the artist, the symbols used, the cultural context, and technique, they would be better equipped to interact with the work. Admittedly, museums have struggled long and hard with the problems of labels, guides, and audiovisual aids, particularly in terms of finding the right balance between the informative and the intrusive. An understanding of what makes the aesthetic experience possible should help in developing guidelines.

Some of the obstacles mentioned were physical, such as noise, unhelpful guards, and confusing layouts and signs. Csikszentmihalyi suggested, however, that the identification of these obstacles does not necessarily mean that museums should be overly concerned with removing them. In his view, the decision to make museums more accessible to a wider audience must come from theoretically grounded values and principles, not merely the existence of physical facts. He noted that lacking a theoretical position, one might be tempted to conclude that the cure for the intrusion of rude guards would be to train the guards to be more solicitous. But it is not the rudeness per se that constitutes the problem; rather, it is the intrusion that rudeness provides. Solicitous guards could be equally intrusive and just as problematic.

Csikszentmihalyi concluded by stressing the value of a theoretical approach to the solution of problems and the setting of goals. With a theory in place, systematic experimentation and incremental improvement is possible. Without a theory, facts generated by surveys tend to have an ad hoc, temporary significance. Local problems may get solved and generalizations can be made, but facts alone lack the power to explain and predict. Thus, as in all domains of knowledge, it is through the dialectical interchange of facts and theories that we understand what happens inside the museum.

Summary of Remarks by Richard Brettell

Richard Brettell admitted that this was the first time he had heard the term *flow experience*, and he found it fascinating. What he took to be the central assumption is that the goal of the visitor and the museum should be to facilitate a flow experience for the viewer. However, being familiar with all the mental gymnastics that one goes through in an encounter with a work of art, Brettell believes that he has had very few flow experiences in museums, although he has enjoyed his time in them. Wondering whether museum professionals should even attempt to create an environment where such experiences are possible, he questioned some of the assumptions embedded in

Csikszentmihalyi's presentation, including the idea that a flow experience, or aesthetic experience, is something that one has alone during a private encounter between individual and object. In his experience, most museum encounters do not occur in isolation, but in the presence of other people. In fact, given the number of objects present, it is difficult to select a particular one with which to have a flow experience. Consequently, the museum's responsibility to collect and store large numbers of objects becomes antithetical to its role as facilitator of the flow experience.

Brettell has found that his most powerful encounters with works of art do not occur in the presence of the work but in his mind, as he engages memory and reflection after leaving the work. He feels that an important part of the aesthetic experience is to take away from the encounter a powerful visual impression that is unique to each individual; the most powerful aesthetic experience may be one that the museum cannot control or facilitate. There is also the challenge presented by works of art that were not created to be experienced in the traditional way, but rather as part of other ongoing experiences. Museums have to recognize the scope and variability of the ways art is experienced and avoid focusing exclusively on the dramatic, singular encounter between the individual and the work.

Of particular concern to Brettell is the density of experiences provided by museums; that density may have to be altered to facilitate and encourage the flow experience. Perhaps museum professionals should be more concerned with altering and varying that density as one proceeds through the museum so that visitors can more easily lose themselves before the work of art. The tension between the desire for loss of self and the desire to control that same process is very evident in Csikszentmihalyi's work, and for Brettell one of the most interesting things about art is that it is almost impossible to control one's response to it. He suggested that it may be more effective to communicate that indeterminacy to viewers and let them know that it is perfectly fine if they do not know what they think about a work, since there may be no "correct" approach to it.

Brettell recommended that museums focus on providing visitors with sufficient physical orientation to the museum, such as maps and signs, and that they should work on varying the density of the presentations of art. In this way, they might better serve the public than by categorizing and interpreting works of art.

Summary of Remarks by J. Kent Lydecker

Asserting that his own philosophy is that the museum is a public institution with two clearly defined tasks, Kent Lydecker described those tasks as preserving and conserving art objects and providing the public with intellectual and physical access to those objects. Ultimately the professional's activity is grounded in the physical and administrative concerns of maintaining the building and the objects. Making the best of a contradictory situation is an ever-present fact of museum life. In Lydecker's opinion the best that the museum staff can hope to do is to provide the preconditions for the kind of experience Csikszentmihalyi described. The quality of a flow experience is conditioned by many circumstances unique to the time, place, and person; quality cannot be predicted or engineered, only encouraged.

Lydecker agrees with Csikszentmihalyi's position on the importance of joining theory to practice. Both are essential to the furtherance of the museum's public policy, as is a firm grounding in values and principles. Lydecker proposed some models that might be used to frame museum work. In conceptualizing the museum as an educational institution, he suggested the model of a line between the work of art and the audience, rather than the notion of the museum as filter or mediator. Another image Lydecker invoked was that of the triangle, with the audience, object, and educator in a triadic relationship. In concurrence with Brettell, he stressed the importance of remembering that objects ultimately speak to individuals both directly and indirectly, while in their presence and after the fact.

Summary of Remarks by David Curry

David Curry grounded his comments in history, beginning with a quote from 1868 in which the commentator deplored the fact that even an educated viewer who had no knowledge of art would prefer "second-rate" sentimental and popular images to the less familiar work of Titian or Velázquez. He also quoted Whistler to the effect that taste in art, unlike other forms of specialized knowledge, is presumed to be possessed by and accessible to everyone, so that the critic, qualified only by his eloquence, becomes an authority on art: "The College of Physicians with Tennyson as President" would be considered madness, "but a school of art with an accomplished *littérateur* at its head disturbs no one!"

Curry proposed that knowledge of art can only be gained by experience with art and that museums should return to the object itself and discontinue some of the practices that have proliferated in recent years, such as large survey exhibitions in which the only flow is from the entrance to the exit.

He suggested that focused exhibitions, of five carefully chosen works, could be more beneficial to the public and less of a drain on a museum's shrinking resources.

He finds it comforting to remember, when looking at market research data, that the museum and the department store share an architectural genesis in the nineteenth century. Professionals need to recognize that they are packaging and delivering intellectual material and that the point is to grab the public's attention and raise people's interest in art. Through film and video, the artists themselves can be the best spokespeople and guides for their own work, and Curry plans to work more on bringing these materials to the museum audience. If the power of the object is recognized, it is a humbling as well as a liberating experience.

Summary of General Discussion

Wondering if the comparison of Csikszentmihalyi's work and the focus groups was a problematic pairing of two quite distinct types of information, **Rose M. Glennon** asked if most of Csikszentmihalyi's research was actually focused on experts who had a superior knowledge of their field. **Csikszentmihalyi** admitted that that was true, but he pointed out that his research had expanded to include lay people and nonexperts of different classes and cultural backgrounds, all of whom describe their own most meaningful experiences in the same terms. Although conceding the importance of that phenomenon, Glennon suggested that "flow" was not a fair expectation of the average museum visitor since it may require a degree of intense involvement that is not possible in the museum setting. She believes that there may have been one or two people who had a flow experience, but that the majority had some other positive, but less intense, experience.

John Schloder disagreed. He proposed that it is possible to facilitate such an experience, which he often has had while listening to music, even though he has had no formal musical training. **Roger Mandle** does not believe that the only way to have a flow experience is to be alone with a single great work of art. It is even possible, he feels, to have flow experiences with works of art that are less than great. He is more interested in the idea that one can have these experiences in a group and that the group can enhance the flow experience through exchange and communications. A football game at the moment of a touchdown, for example, can provide a person with a significant feeling of participation and transcendence in the context of a crowd.

Csikszentmihalyi said he had not intended that the model of the flow experience be as exclusive and absolute as it was being understood. Various levels of attainment can be achieved in many of life's experiences, and even a modest approximation of flow is better than the mundane experience of everyday life. He sees flow as a *terminus ad quem*, a goal to be striven for. **Mandle** agreed, noting that art can provide experiences at a number of different levels, depending on what is being demanded by the viewer. The object itself is not the end, but it is a catalyst for other transformations.

Csikszentmihalyi recalled that both Brettell and Curry had cited flow experiences while away from the object, in the course of remembering, thinking, and writing about it. This is precisely the kind of reaction one can expect from an expert, but not from an average visitor, because it is the end product of many years of visualization and intimate knowledge of art objects. He agreed with Curry that, ultimately, it is the object itself that carries the aesthetic power, but he noted that that power is only accessible to those who can interpret it. Aesthetic theories that posit a kind of "magic bullet" effect emanating from objects are, for Csikszentmihalyi, unconvincing. The object can have power only for those who are prepared to read and understand it; the final experience is the result of a dialectical exchange between object and viewer.

Curry affirmed that while works of art may carry sacred values, those values change meaning over time. Works of art are, finally, static objects that require contexts and receptors to inscribe them with meaning. This fact heightens Curry's sense of responsibility to learn as much as possible about objects before assessing them. He is particularly disturbed by the fact that so few visitors give themselves permission to investigate art objects, considering the fact that as consumers and shoppers they are very knowledgeable and informed.

Deborah Gribbon disagreed with the assumption that one cannot have a meaningful experience of art without prior knowledge. In fact, unless one's interest is initially sparked by a work, there is little basis for going out and seeking more knowledge about it. She believes that the goal of museum professionals should not be to tell visitors what they should know about something, but to give them a range of information and then let them decide what more they want to know. If visitors get the impression that their responses are somehow inappropriate, the next step in the process will never take place.

Anne d'Harnoncourt noted that an important aspect of people's museum experience is watching other people experience art. When guides have a successful tour, often it is due less to their words than to their manner and enthusiasm. While information is an essential part of encouraging visitors to have a successful museum experience, another element is showing them that this is possible and, indeed, happening around them. The preparation for experiencing a work of art may take many forms that are not yet well understood and cannot be provided by the museum.

Neil Harris recalled that in the early twentieth century there was a contest regarding behavior in art museums, and the winning suggestion was that people should applaud in front of works of art that particularly appealed to them. This suggests the need to relate viewer with performer to give audiences an opportunity to express their collective pleasure. It also brings up the issue of visitors wanting to see the highlights of a collection, its most famous pieces. Harris noted the analogy between touring the houses of the stars and seeking out the objects that have provoked the most sustained and profound emotional responses. A museum's decision to mount the "star tour" is complicated in that it meets some needs and denies others. While these shows can be formulaic and unoriginal, they are also attempts to provide convenient access to works with a "proven magical record." The tourist sensibility to some degree seeks conversion and engages in a pilgrimage for emotional intensity. Harris pointed out that when these pilgrimages do not result in the desired experience—and many nineteenth-century travel diaries attest to the fact that they did not—disappointment ensues. For museum professionals, the public's desire for transcendence is both a challenge to and a validation of their work.

Lewis Sharp believes that true flow experiences are possible only when one is fully prepared for and involved in a process and that museum experiences are more likely to be pleasant rather than powerful. He feels that using terms such as "powerful" and "peak" set up expectations that are not realistic. **Bret Waller** feels that there are "high" peaks and "low" peaks, so that while the model of an all-or-nothing experience may be dangerous, it is the museum professional's job to make the experience sufficiently rewarding so that the visitor will return. **Danielle Rice** added a caution against using media-inspired hyperbole, which can mislead visitors regarding what they can expect from a museum experience.

Rice appreciates Csikszentmihalyi's work for its contextualization of aesthetic experience within other human experience. The tendency among aestheticians has been to separate this experience from all others, and this has been a difficult problem for museum professionals. Yet another side of the issue is that the use of the eyes for a powerful experience is a socially and culturally conditioned activity and very specific to our time. Much of the art displayed in museums was not intended to give visual or aesthetic pleasure. As an educator, she feels the problem is that her audience is not prepared to use their eyes in a way that will give them the maximum pleasure from the art object.

Jay Gates reminded the participants that the repeated message of the focus groups was that visitors felt they did not get enough information. What they are not telling us is that they do not know what to do with the experience in the first place. So that while we can address the informational problems, the layout and organizational and signage problems, if the visitors cannot *see* the object, the information and professional facilitation cannot make it available to them. Museum professionals cannot develop the visitor's perceptual skills through labels, only through teaching in small groups. He was surprised that no one had brought up the public education system, which is supposed to prepare children to be educated adults who have the ability to see art and enrich their own lives. This discussion can only nibble around the edges of a far larger problem, which is how people become educated.

Kent Lydecker suggested that Csikszentmihalyi's description of the flow experience should be seen as a metaphoric way of understanding an intellectual process. All of the problems under discussion lead to the most fundamental question of all: What is art, and how does it operate in our culture? Two or three generations ago, there was a canon and a revealed truth that could be assumed and taught. This is no longer the case. For Lydecker, the focus groups have contradicted the conclusions of Rice and Csikszentmihalyi in that they suggest that visitors have a capacity to experience flow without preparation. The fact that some of the least educated and most disadvantaged members of his group had the most profound aesthetic appreciation implies that some of the assumptions of democratic institutions are basically correct. This was a humbling realization for Lydecker because it suggested that, even with knowledge and experience, no one has a lock on the aesthetic experience.

John Herrmann found it gratifying that so many people in the focus groups had flow experiences, while many highly trained art historians have only routine responses to art. A certain willingness and a particular set of conditions are necessary in order to give oneself over to the experience of a work of art. Even a list of the ten greatest masterpieces in a museum can encourage the visitor to approach and look at art.

As hard as it may be to agree on the nature of the aesthetic experience, **James N. Wood** believes that the ultimate responsibility of the museum professional is for the quality of the works of art. Although it is impossible finally to define *quality*, the challenge of the museum professional's job is to try to guarantee that the works presented are the very best available. Just as the rock climber has the greatest flow when he is confronting the sheerest cliff, by analogy, the museum visitor will have his greatest flow experiences while standing before the greatest works that the museum professional can provide.

Barbara Martin had some of the same questions as Rose Glennon about the flow experiences of novices. Thinking about it, she concluded that some initial experiences can be flow experiences. **Deborah Schwartz** was concerned that much of the discussion implies that museum professionals have never had any success with the public at all, an idea that is not borne out by the experience of the last five years. Perhaps what is needed is a look at the successes, those instances in which the museum connected with the public: why have there not been more of them? It would help to know if the answer is technical, such as lack of funds, or curatorial, or educational. Schwartz is not comfortable with the idea of the general public as a homogeneous and monolithic entity. She reminded the group that the public is made up of a diverse group of individuals, all of whom respond in different ways.

John Walsh, responding to James Wood, agreed that the quality of the objects was of paramount importance. He noted, however, that the most moving moment in the focus group he witnessed was hearing a woman talk about getting lost in a work of art and having it change her life. The work was Alma-Tadema's *Spring*, an object that for many curators represents the nadir of kitsch. There has to be a role for objects that do not meet professional standards of quality. If directors and curators cannot look realistically at the process by which novices acquire skills and be sympathetic to the process, they will not make progress toward meeting the needs of the audience. **Wood** insisted that while objects should not be excluded, the quality distinctions must be made explicit if viewers are going to work their way from a Leroy Neiman to a Cézanne.

Evan Turner finds that the major difficulty is overcoming the apparent conflict between curators' standards and the education professionals' convictions. It is helpful to realize that some believe that the more one brings to the experience of the object, the more intense is the flow experience. This may be the key to why curators, who are the best informed about an object, seem to feel that their experience is "finer" and more distinguished than that of the person who is approaching the object from the educational perspective. If it can be acknowledged that experience occurs at many levels and is of many varieties, all of them valid, museum professionals may be better able to communicate with each other and to realize their goals.

THE FOCUS GROUP EXPERIMENT
IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Moderator: Bret Waller, Associate Director for Education and Public Affairs,
The J. Paul Getty Museum
Speaker: Neil Harris, Department of History, University of Chicago

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Summary of Remarks by Bret Waller

Bret Waller introduced Neil Harris as a distinguished scholar in the field of American art and culture and a professor of history at the University of Chicago. Harris earned his doctorate at Harvard University, after receiving B.A.s from Columbia and Cambridge Universities. Waller was sure that many of those present were familiar with Harris's writings, particularly those related to the history of American museums. When he spoke this spring to the Association of Art Museum Directors, Harris concluded his remarks with the admonition to "look to your histories," which Waller took as a reference to the profession's propensity to reinvent the wheel every decade or so.

An intriguing pattern emerges from a close look at Harris's extensive publication list. Along with articles such as "The Gilded Age Revisited: Boston and the Museum Movement," "A Historical Perspective on Museum Advocacy," and "Museums: The Hidden Agenda," there appears "Spaced Out at the Shopping Center." And in addition to *The Artist in American Society*, we find *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum*. Barnum, a pioneer in the field of visitor studies, knew his audience so well that he was able to calculate their rate of birth.

For people who work in institutions that devote much of their resources to understanding the past, museum professionals have short memories as to what has gone before in their own institutions. They owe Professor Harris a debt for his efforts to understand museums and their histories.

Summary of Remarks by Neil Harris

Not only are the focus group interviews suggestive resources for policy makers but they also provide a rich set of resources for students of museum history. It is this relationship between current concerns and the institutional past that Neil Harris wished to address by placing the focus group project within the larger context of museum culture and the intricate modern history of surveying opinion and desire. When and why, he asked, do we ask what people think and want, rather than give them what is available or what is believed to be good for them? To answer what seems to be a simple question, *it is necessary to examine changing ideas of authority and intention and to* look at the complex processes of transmitting human values that are at the core of our cultural institutions.

Rather than use history to reveal the lineage of current problems and debates, Harris proposed to use historical evidence to demonstrate discontinuities with the past. Although the current Getty project has an ancestry, in some respects it is unprecedented in the history of art museums. Additionally, its timing, sponsorship, and development may be even more significant than its undeniably important findings. The appearance of the study marks a new stage in the history of art museum management, a phase that contains some surprising and disquieting features involving not only museums but also the larger system of cultural production.

Harris explained that before reaching his conclusions he would need to discuss American methods of discovering what people think, how museums have or have not participated in this enterprise, and how the Getty project fits into this historical context. He would identify four stages of art museum consciousness that correspond to four stages in a longer process of self-scrutiny, but in arbitrarily naming them he was simply trying to organize a context for the text that we call the museum. This process necessarily will be tentative, allusive, and generalizing and will draw extensively on the research of others. But because, in Harris's opinion, this is a special moment in the history of art museums, it is important to take the opportunity to assess the overall situation and think ahead.

The art of asking people systematically what they think is relatively new. Popular opinion as a factor in planning did not emerge until both the election process and the marketplace had achieved their central social roles, following the economic and political revolutions of the eighteenth century. One of the first manifestations of this phenomenon came through political polling. The first surviving records date to a straw poll of 1824, sponsored by a newspaper. Other American newspapers subsequently sponsored similar samplings, which, lacking any scientific method of data collection, were often quite misleading. These polls were popular, partly because of the gambling that accompanied presidential campaigns, and used mailed ballots and personal interviews. Until the early twentieth century, polls were sporadic and unsystematic, and politicians did not rely on them as an indicator of public opinion.

The other area of opinion testing was the private market. The production revolution of nineteenth-century America generated aggressive advertising and promotional techniques. A new group of specialists in public taste appeared who emphasized the importance of psychological factors in determining consumer behavior. Nevertheless, it was not until after World War I that consumers were queried systematically about their preferences.

The first era of museum founding occurred in the late nineteenth century, when the political and economic uses of opinion making were relatively undeveloped. Consequently, there was little reason for museum officials to engage in audience analysis, particularly because the basic mission of such institutions was to present valued and established forms of human art. The conviction was that with accessibility, long hours, low admission fees, and useful labeling and brochures, the public would flock to the museum. Other assumptions and concerns were the cultivation of the young and the value of institutional public relations.

That museum directors and staff would need or want to find out what the public desired would have seemed absurd. The issues that concerned museum managers in the nineteenth century were internal to the museum and derived from their own values and strategies. They debated whether to celebrate foreign art at the expense of native art, whether decorative art deserved as much attention as fine arts, and whether resources should be spent acquiring authentic works rather than good reproductions. They wondered whether historical accuracy was more important than aesthetic theatricality and how many hours the museum should be open.

Museum managers understood that it was good to increase attendance and they studied circulation figures, but they had developed many programs and techniques for accomplishing that goal, including membership drives, discounts, lectures, children's programs, and free catalogues. Harris called this period of museum development one of authoritarian condescension, with managers and trustees valuing popularity, but not prioritizing it. America in this age was still a "producer culture," interested in customers for a given product but not willing to design the product around consumer demand. While the museum culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was one of high intelligence, reflectiveness, energy, and ambition, it was also remarkably self-contained and absorbed with problems of delivery, which was, after all, the standard obsession of a producer sensibility.

The break in this tradition came in the 1920s, the first great era of marketing and display and the genesis of many of our best-known consumer habits. Advances in social sciences, supported by foundations and professional associations, and the growth of empirical sociology contributed great improvements in statistical methods and predictability. President Hoover appointed the Committee on Social Trends to report on the state of American life, and new enthusiasm for empirical research and quantitative measurement led to their application to many aspects of life.

Another historical development that made the study of public preference a priority in this period was the growth of radio and other communications media. The financial gains at stake in the competition for radio audiences provided a new incentive for identifying what people thought and desired, and commercial sponsorship and network programming forced systematic research projects upon advertising and radio executives. With an audience in the tens of millions, it was possible to use fan mail and write-in campaigns as a gauge of interest. Finally, private industry eagerly commissioned and financed marketing research to identify the kind of packaging and products the public preferred. It was in the 1920s that industrial design was applied to familiar products to make them more attractive and salable.

If the 1920s were the seeding decade, the 1930s were a flowering one. In 1935 *Fortune* magazine published its first poll. That same year George Gallup syndicated his poll on a variety of important issues to newspapers. Later in the decade investigators were supported by distinguished social scientists fleeing Hitler. Universities such as Princeton, Columbia, and Chicago established departments of opinion research, and the *Public Opinion Quarterly* appeared in 1937, followed by the creation of the National Opinion Research Center.

An examination of the vocabulary of art museum leaders in this period provides evidence of the pervasiveness of opinion research. Yale professor Edward S. Robinson insisted that psychological investigation of the audience should precede any attempt to solve the problems of installation, labeling, guidance, and education at the museum. The Carnegie Corporation supported a series of carefully structured visitor studies that were aimed at establishing a plan of action for museum management and design that would encourage public visitation.

This work bore the mark of the professional self-confidence of people concerned with universal law and objective generalizations. On the whole, the studies were far more concerned with the nature of the environment being visited than with the visitor, but they showed an awareness of the fact that the museum environment was misunderstood by the public. A museum specialist, Philip Youtz, noted in 1933 that "the average museum resembles a picture puzzle... a sequence of private memorials" that the public was unlikely to support. Ironically, the era of museum investigations reaped results at just the point when private and public funding was collapsing under the strain of the Great Depression. The solution was to use scientific research to gauge public needs and interests more reliably and, thereby, justify appeals for greater tax support. Youtz understood that museums had to emphasize their educational and recreational aspects if they were to survive as public, nonelite institutions. If a museum is to compete with other entertainments, it must arouse and sustain the curiosity and interest of its visitors. Youtz was convinced that the key to identifying those interests was social science, which could analyze and measure public indifference and apathy and thereby uncover its source.

There were other, less positivistic suggestions being considered at this time, some of them inspired by John Dewey's writings on art, education, and democracy. Dewey saw the lack of contact between museum managers and the ordinary public as a major problem. But again, scientific method and model building was seen as the solution to museum audiences. Powerful claims were being made for the expert polls, and consumer analysis and communications surveys had counterparts in the cultural sector. Art museums and social scientists seemed to be marching hand in hand on the road to ever better visitor services, physical plants, and more effective exhibitions.

Three decades later, however, after enormous changes in mass media and amazing advances in analyzing and exploiting consumer markets, museum officials seemed stuck in a time warp. Two Canadian analysts asked in 1961, "Why do museums lag behind commerce and industry in employing the knowledge and techniques of the social sciences in the solution of fundamental problems?" They concluded that the failure rested on the inadequacy and incompetence of the surveys, but there were, perhaps, more fundamental reasons for the failure. One might have been the overweening self-confidence of the first professional claims, the insistence that social science held all the answers. More fundamentally, there was a professional reluctance in the 1940s and 1950s to acknowledge that museums were linked functionally to the commercial sector. The very vocabulary was repugnant; and exemption from the normal course of business practices, from the correlation of desire and satisfaction, was a primary feature of art museum identity. This exceptionalism constituted much of the charm, naiveté, power, and irrelevance of the museum in national life. Their indifference to the market was the glory of these institutions. As indicated by a quote from an annual report of the Metropolitan Museum, museums thought of themselves as preservers of "high objectives" who needed to offer no apology for being "normal in abnormal times."

Harris proposed that the sobering challenge of the Depression, the lingering influence of authoritarian ideals and traditional wisdom, and the idea of the museum as foil to the logic of commercial civilization all contributed to the situation in which museums found themselves in the 1950s. Until that time, museums had been interested in how many visitors attended, but not in why they came and who they were. By the 1960s art museums began a new phase of institutional inquiry and adopted a "populist preoccupation," an anxious effort to be more responsive to the public mood. Surveys of audience composition and motivation were instituted, museum shops expanded, and economic impact statements were launched.

One cause of these new initiatives was the massive influx of federal funding in the Kennedy-Johnson years, which was linked to ideals of service and the proven support of broad constituencies. Arts support in the 1960s, while unprecedented in generosity, was based jingoistically on Cold War claims about the vigor of culture under capitalism. It was also economically utilitarian in its linkage of arts renewal to urban growth and development. Businesses were urged to support cultural institutions, not just for civic reasons, but because cultural attractions such as museums, baseball teams, and convention halls enhanced tourism and stimulated investment. Business funders, who themselves used market research techniques, communicated their enthusiasm for social science methods to museums.

There also was a purely economic rationale for the new self-scrutiny on the part of museums. The 1960s and 1970s were years of intensive membership drives, general admission fees, capital drives, and aggressive marketing of museum goods and services such as posters, cards, books, and reproductions. Harris described the budgetary status of the largest American museum, the Metropolitan, as emblematic of the financial histories of many others. In the 1940s the museum relied on its endowment and municipal appropriations for over 90 percent of its operating budget. As late as 1965 its endowment provided 65 percent of its budget, with 23 percent coming from the city, the rest from auxiliary income. By 1972 the Metropolitan Museum had an operating deficit of $1.5 million on a budget of $13.7 million, and aggressive fundraising, grant applications, and the museum store moved in to fill the gap. By 1977 auxiliary activities exceeded all other museum income, reaching $20 million in 1978. These figures suggest that in the 1970s major art museums were entering both the retail market and the political arena; information gathering was used to increase their efficiency of operation in both areas.

This market-focused approach troubled many museum professionals, who worried about maintaining their traditional priorities in the face of such grave financial pressures. However, a positive side effect of this new responsiveness was that directors and curators began to react to those constituencies who were aggressively seeking representation on the staff and in exhibition policies. The civil rights movement and other consciousness-raising crusades generated an even greater interest in precise quantification for the purpose of challenging or meeting quotas, and quantitative data were used both to defend the museum from charges and to establish goals, as well as in filling out grant applications. Museums found it essential to have data on economic classes, giving patterns, and interest levels so that appeals could be made, critics answered, and ammunition gathered in the continuing struggle to attract more public funding.

The Metropolitan Museum was among the first to commission a visitor study, in 1973. Characteristically, the questions focused on reputation rather than process, on the esteem in which the museum was held by visitors, the cultivation of relatively well-to-do attendees, and the growth of tourism. The data collected were superficial and result-oriented and served as an enthusiastic endorsement of institutional greatness. Within three years of the Metropolitan Museum's study, a similar visitor survey and focus group study was prepared by Leo Burnett for The Art Institute of Chicago. The focus of the study was explaining how visitors differed from nonvisitors, but the data served to highlight issues of community representation that were articulated in administrative changes and exhibition programming as well as in promotional campaigns aimed at broadening the socioeconomic base of visitation.

Not all art museums participated in these programs or were concerned with expanding their constituencies and discovering the desires of their audiences. However, a sufficient number did respond and reorganize themselves to make this trend significant. If the first phase of museum consciousness was one of self-confident distribution, and the second was dominated by environmental impact studies concerned with making the museum visit more efficient and effective, the third era of audience investigation was absorbed with issues of reputation, promotion, and the accommodation of multicultural constituencies. After 1970 almost 300 audience studies were completed for museums and performing arts institutions, but it appears that these studies had only a marginal impact on policy making; they were ignored when they challenged strongly held views. With their focus on expressive emphasis and attention-getting, the surveys were ineffective in challenging the basic logic of the commissioning organization and were motivated by specific and immediate institutional needs. Most were driven by marketing needs, which makes them very different in character from the current set of investigations undertaken by the Getty.

Harris next turned to the task of placing the present project in a larger context. He noted that in the 1970s and 1980s museums became interested not only in sociological data on visitors but also in learning and perceptual theories, in an attempt to discover the educational impact of exhibitions and what kinds of presentations make the strongest impression. This departure from past approaches, a departure that includes the focus groups, is as important for the sensibility that the new studies represent as for the data that they collect. They indicate a new view of the functions and purposes of the art museum. Harris labeled the past three eras of museum development as the ages of "authoritarian condescension," "authoritarian experimentalism," and "populist deference." The fourth era he calls "existential scrutiny." To define this present era, it is necessary to answer the questions of how these self-studies differ from past studies and why they are being undertaken.

Harris concluded that the focus groups do not appear to be motivated primarily by technical or marketing needs, but by a nonutilitarian objective. Because they involve nonvisitors as well as visitors and the entire range of staff, directors, curators, and educators alike, it seems that a far more comprehensive conceptual picture of the museum is being sought. Although they have some of the same components, they are not audience studies. They are more experiential and intended to reconstruct the quality and nature of the interaction of visitors with art objects.

Additionally, focus group interviews emphasize attitudes, volition, perception, awareness, and opinion rather than behavior, and as such they are structured around subjectivity. They are concerned with what people believe is happening within the museum rather than what should or does happen. In fact, there is a noticeable indifference to quantifiable behavior patterns. The focus groups are not designed to test specific hypotheses but are, instead, explorations of perceptions and expectations. Even curatorial comments reveal a reluctance to specify the content or character of the museum encounter beyond a general wish for a benevolent outcome and intellectual satisfaction. The focus group interviews are not projectable, although they illuminate some common patterns and confirm and emphasize the varieties of reactions that individuals can have.

Open-ended, experiential, diffuse, qualitative, and deemphasizing expert authority, the focus group project assumes a supportive sensibility that is radically different from any preceding studies; it implies that a new conception of art museums and audiences may be in force. The museum is being reconceptualized as a set of transactions between exhibitor and visitor in which meaning and value are constantly renegotiated. The museum as final authority on itself is disappearing as surely as the literary text has disappeared in contemporary theory.

For Harris, the radicalism of the present moment and the promise of current inquiry lie in the willingness to reconceive every aspect of museum learning and experience, "to admit the need for phenomenological reconstruction." The veil is being lifted from the museum's most mysterious and yet most typical function, the encounter with the work of art. Museum professionals, in inquiring after the thoughts, emotions, and attitudes of their visitors, run the risk of raising difficult questions about the logic, efficiency, and sensitivity of traditional viewing rituals.

In closing, Harris proposed that a new and exciting era of museum history has begun, one that may bring uncomfortable revelations and unprecedented challenges. But this evolution, which has been a long time in coming, testifies to a new tolerance for diversity and ambiguity in the structuring of viewer-object relationships. Although there will be much disagreement about the lessons to be drawn, a new phenomenologically oriented inquiry has begun.

Summary of General Discussion

Bret Waller thanked Harris for a stimulating and sobering look at the past, which demonstrated both a historical perspective and the benefits of the protective function of institutional amnesia. He then invited comments and questions from the floor.

Kent Lydecker asserted that, as someone who has been a participant in the evolutionary process that Harris described, he found Harris's analysis "dead on." **Harris** expressed an interest in knowing whether people who have experienced the changes in museum management observed the same radical shift in orientation that he proposed. If so, could they suggest causes for it? His own impression is that this is a phenomenon of only the last half-dozen years. **Henry Hawley** suggested that one of the changes that may have precipitated this shift is that the governance of museums, the nature of trustees, has changed a great deal.

James Wood feels that the latest generation of directors has a new sense of humility. He is concerned, however, that this humility may be tied to a loss of confidence. It is his hope that humility can be combined with confidence and an articulated philosophy. In regard to Harris's era of "populist deference," Wood noted that this put a great deal of pressure on museums to move to the left. Now, particularly in the last year and a half, there is a new counterpressure from the right that is evident in congressional controversies over obscenity. He wonders if this is a temporary shift, or does it imply that a heavy price will have to be paid for the openness of the last decade?

Harris is not certain whether the intensity of the current backlash is temporary or represents a trend. However, because all political cultures go through phases, it is natural to expect variable cycles. The question is one of extreme, and Harris feels that recent events constitute a media-supported overreaction that would have been inconceivable thirty years ago when a similar cycle was in force. If the cultural institutions have functioned the way they are supposed to, they should have made a difference in mass opinion. Harris believes that they *have* made a difference and that the programs of popular cultural cultivation carried out by the National Endowment for the Arts over the last quarter century have created constituencies that will support basic principles. The politicians who assume that nothing has happened during these years may be dead wrong; if so, this reactionary period is likely to be short-lived. **Wood** noted that the ability of the arts community to perceive that fact will be essential to their success in combating the reactionary forces.

Lydecker noted that there is a demographic factor that will have a bearing on these events: the educational level of the American population has been increasing since the second World War. There is a rising proportion of college-educated citizens, who historically have constituted an automatic audience for art museums. This demographic shift also has been key to the demand for a reformulation of the museum's relationship to its audience. Additionally, there has been a reconsideration of the object, which is, after all, the *raison d'être* of the institution. Long after the present generation of museum professionals is gone, people will continue to go to museums to see and study the objects. Lydecker reiterated David Curry's insistence of the previous day that the basic confidence in the object as worthy of study must remain unshaken.

Deborah Gribbon believes that the waning of large exhibitions also should be viewed as a major difference between this era and the previous one. In assuming new goals, museums have turned away from the "blockbuster," at least in theory.

Anne d'Harnoncourt asked Harris to explain the ways in which he sees developments in libraries and universities as related to those occurring in museums. **Harris** sees libraries shifting their focus from books to the more abstract entity of "information." Both libraries and publishers are concerned with redressing their traditional focus on rare books and special collections, which serve a limited group of patrons, and turning to the dissemination of information to a larger audience. These issues are being debated in academic and special libraries, such as the Morgan and the Newberry. It is all part of a reassessment of traditional assumptions in light of new goals.

Patterson Sims asked if the Vietnam War was ever mentioned in the Metropolitan Museum's annual reports during the 1960s and 1970s. Although admitting that he had not read the reports for other than budgetary information, **Harris** said he did notice that for World Wars I and II there was a great deal of interest in the changes the war years had wrought in social relationships.

Sims noted that Harris's presentation suggested a shift in museum focus away from the object and to the museum store, the restaurant, the auditorium, and the video center. He wondered if this implied anything about the centrality of the object: do the facts point out a discontinuity between museum theory and practice? **Harris** feels that these auxiliary museum functions were developed primarily to maintain the centrality of the object and that they represent a response to the threat of institutional dissolution. In the financially troubled decade of the 1970s, museum professionals were panicked about the very survival of their institutions, and many of these functions were instituted to stave off the necessity of divesting the museum of its objects.

At the end of the session, **Lewis Sharp** pointed out that the Getty Trust, like the Carnegie Foundation in an earlier time, is having a profound impact on the entire museum field by providing the money for projects such as the focus groups.

MUST WE GIVE THE VISITORS WHAT THEY SAY THEY WANT? ALTERNATIVES

Moderator: Anne d'Harnoncourt, Director, Philadelphia Museum of Art
Discussants: Henry Hawley, Chief Curator of Later Western Art, The Cleveland Museum of Art
Patterson Williams, Director of Education, Denver Art Museum
David Steadman, Director, The Toledo Museum of Art

Summary of Remarks by Anne d'Harnoncourt

Although admitting that Neil Harris's address was a hard act to follow, Anne d'Harnoncourt felt that, as members of a "newly supple" profession, she and her colleagues should be equipped to tackle the theoretical demands of the session's central question: must we give the visitors what they say they want? Still, museum professionals should be wary of extrapolating final conclusions from the information rendered by a limited set of interviews. When the Philadelphia Museum's focus groups asked for a new map, one was provided. But, although one visitor wanted red lines on the floor to guide visitors and another thought that costumed interpreters for the Japanese Tea House would be interesting, neither of those requests was acted upon.

One of the issues that d'Harnoncourt wanted to bring to the foreground was the desire expressed by visitors for comfort in the museum. Although this is an understandable and sensible request in terms of the physical setting—in the provision of benches, signs, and helpful guards—comfort is a problematic concept when applied to works of art. A Monet landscape may be more comfortable than a Goya, but that is not what the museum is about. The questions to be addressed in the session are: how do visitors decide what they want? What does the museum professional really know about what visitors want? and, How can museum professionals help visitors begin to want something different from what they say they want? In addition, the quest for information, which was clearly articulated in the focus groups, needs to be spelled out with more specificity. What are people really asking for when they request more information? Are they in fact asking, as Danielle Rice wondered earlier, for "meaning," which is difficult to provide?

Before beginning the discussion, d'Harnoncourt mentioned a common visitor question that particularly troubles her: what am I supposed to think? This was one of the most alarming, although perhaps the most understandable, of all the questions articulated in the focus groups, and d'Harnoncourt wonders how museum professionals should respond to it.

Summary of Remarks by Henry Hawley

In Henry Hawley's opinion, the obvious answer to the session's title question is, No, museums do not have to give visitors what they ask for. On the other hand, why shouldn't museums try, within clear parameters, to accommodate the visitor? However, in trying to do so, it is important not to intrude on the sensibilities and activities of others. This proviso is critical in answering a question of this type.

When Hawley was twelve years old, he attended a performance of Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* and sat through much of it in a state of boredom. But when the trio in the last act began, he had an experience unlike anything he had known before, a physical and emotional response that he now compares to sexual and religious ecstasy. Prior to this performance, Hawley had never heard the opera before, nor any other music by Strauss. He knew very little about music in general, or about the German language; intellectually he was quite unprepared for the experience. His reason for sharing the anecdote was to point out that this kind of transcendent emotional experience can be extremely important in a person's life; it may even help to define that person as an individual. Hawley believes that in this kind of experience, thought is not a major component; the experience is essentially noncognitive and almost purely emotional.

After *Der Rosenkavalier*, Hawley had a similar experience with a visual object, one of Matisse's jungle pictures. Throughout his life he has had these experiences in relationship to the visual arts, music, and dance, and although it is impossible to predict what kind of stimulus will effect this response, Hawley continues to seek opportunities for transcendence. His hope is that museums will continue to make possible this kind of intense interaction with works of art, which depends to a large extent on the elimination of barriers, including auditory and visual stimuli of a pedagogical or rational nature.

Having made this point, Hawley admitted that his experiences with visual art have only rarely produced responses of this kind; instead, his most frequently compelling encounters with art objects have been closely related to Csikszentmihalyi's notion of the "flow experience." The dominant mode here is cognitive rather than emotional, and as a curator he has found that the flow experience can be reinforced and nourished by information and by repeated exposure to similar works of art within the museum environment.

On the basis of the focus group responses, Hawley suggested that what the public wants is knowledge and support in their efforts to understand and identify with works of art. Ideally, visitors would prefer to tour the museum with a knowledgeable friend who can verbalize relevant information.

Although this is not feasible, museums can provide audiotapes of sufficient quantity and variety to meet the needs expressed by visitors. In fact, Hawley feels that such audio devices are less intrusive than tours and labeling; their use should be encouraged and expanded. Although there is a need for better written information, the focus groups have made it clear that labels must be short if they are to be used, and there is no way that labeling alone can fulfill the informational needs of visitors.

Summary of Remarks by Patterson Williams

According to Patterson Williams, the question that began the session implies three choices. One choice is a laissez-faire attitude that might be viewed positively as, "Let it be," or negatively as, "Let's ignore them." Another choice is for museum professionals to give the public what they believe the public *should* have. Here the challenge is who should decide this and on what basis. The third possibility is to give people what they *say* they want. Here the challenge is to determine what people actually mean by what they say. Williams's recommendation is to chart a course containing some elements of all three choices.

Although many of us may have had contact with individuals who changed our lives and yet had no interest in, or knowledge of, our feelings or capacities, it is more likely that we are changed for the better by parents, teachers, or mentors with whom we have a dialogue. During our interactions and exchanges with them, these mentors chart a course between giving us what we think we want and what they think we should have. When they become heavy-handed or overbearing, we seek to escape their influence. Mentors and teachers can perform this service through the exercise of forms of intelligence that everyone has in varying degrees and uses with greater or lesser success.

Howard Gardner, in his book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, theorizes that there are several types of intelligence, including the technical, the mathematical, and the spatial. He also talks about two forms of *personal* intelligence: interpersonal and intrapersonal. The latter entails a superior capacity to access one's own feelings and emotions and to discern differences among them, to enmesh them in symbolic codes and draw upon them in guiding behavior. In its most primitive form, the intrapersonal intelligence consists of little more than the ability to distinguish pleasure from pain. At its most developed, intrapersonal intelligence allows one to detect and articulate highly complex and differentiated feelings. This is the kind of intelligence that is identified with the novelist Marcel Proust, with the psychotherapist, or with the sage who draws on his own experience in advising and counseling others.

The other kind of personal intelligence, often linked with the first, turns outward. It enables one to notice and make distinctions among the moods, motivations, and temperaments of others. In its advanced form, it permits a skilled adult to read the intentions and desires, even when hidden, of other individuals and to act upon this knowledge. Highly developed examples of this ability can be seen in the political and religious fields—Mahatma Gandhi, for example—in skilled parents, in teachers, and in therapists. Museum professionals who have such skills can respect both the needs of the individual visitor and their own priorities as experts.

In this dual effort, it is important to determine the range of art experiences that can be termed ideal—those that are not trivial, boring, or stunted. Most museum professionals look to themselves for the language to describe and understand these experiences, and this is a natural and important step. But one must not rely solely on one's subjective understanding; to understand ideal art experiences, one must turn to a community of experts, both professional and amateur.

It is equally important to understand the day-to-day realities of both experts and novices, of frequent and infrequent visitors, of members and those who are less committed. By comparing the ideal and the everyday experience of novices and less committed visitors, museum professionals can identify the tasks they must perform in order to make the museum a better place for less sophisticated visitors.

The task is never going to be finished: there will never be a ribbon-cutting or an opening night. The job requires not only the improvement of such concrete details as directional signs but also an understanding and change in less tangible areas, such as gallery or entryway atmosphere. It is important to try to see the museum and its collections through the eyes of visitors. Visitor research must go beyond the collection of endless facts on the age, income, and education levels of our audiences. Although these facts are not irrelevant, they are not central to the task of getting inside the visitor's experience of the museum facility and the artworks it contains.

Williams noted that although she has conducted detailed comparative marketing surveys on exhibition visitors and program attitudes, these studies shed little light on the visitor's experience of the work of art. She acknowledged that gathering the latter kind of information can be an invasion of privacy, particularly when an attempt is made to study someone's experience of highly personal, powerful moments. This is especially difficult when one is detailing how people with low knowledge of art but high art interest weep over an art object that has a name or style they can neither pronounce nor remember correctly. Yet when these people weep, they are not reacting to manufactured hype or a slick presentation but, rather, to the qualities they perceive in the work.

Williams recommended that three kinds of "conversations" take place as part of the daily business of museums. The first, group conversations or group interviews, should be structured somewhat like focus groups. Such conversations can yield an enormous amount of insight into visitor attitudes. Second, in-depth interviews with individuals can be conducted in a structured manner and, later, transcribed and analyzed using methods developed in the social science field. Last, an old-fashioned but nonetheless extremely useful practice would be to encourage more master-level teaching by prized and well-paid master museum teachers who know both the museum collections and the visitors. These people, through ongoing contact and conversations, can acquire invaluable insights about visitor needs and interests. Their involvement should go beyond docent training and school tours to include a wide range of museum affairs, such as exhibition interpretation.

In closing, Williams said that in contrast to Henry Hawley, she was forty-five before she had a good experience with opera. Prior to that, she had attended a few operas and been bored by them. She certainly had no idea how to prepare herself for a more positive encounter. Recently, however, as a result of a trip to East Germany, she met a group of people in whose lives opera is a major source of pleasure. Subsequently, Williams bought a tape of opera highlights, which she initially used to block out the background noise of various airplane trips. Slowly, over the past three years, she has begun to develop a genuine appreciation for the form and now usually reads librettos and criticism and listens to recordings before attending performances. So although she now shares Hawley's fondness for opera, she feels it is interesting to contrast the radically different routes they took to arrive at their common enthusiasm.

Summary of Remarks by David Steadman

David Steadman began with an opera story of his own. Growing up in Hawaii, he listened to the Metropolitan Opera's radio broadcasts every Saturday. Finally, at age eighteen he attended his first live performance, *The Barber of Seville*, starring Lily Pons. He thought it was the dumbest and most profoundly depressing thing he had ever seen or heard. This experience should have turned him off forever, but a few weeks later he attended a Wagnerian opera and his faith was restored.

Steadman noted that he had come late to the focus process and that he had never been on the other side of the glass, observing the groups during the interviews. But having done all the reading and having seen the videos of the interviews, he had to admit that he found the second set of interviews very depressing, because the conversation had been badly thrown off by the presence of a single disruptive individual. With the nonvisitor group, he was disturbed by the noticeable lack of enthusiasm of the group as a whole, and one of the things that struck him about both groups was the lack of common courtesy on the part of the museum as host. The museum had failed to provide the welcome, the clear directions and instructions about the collections that the visitors needed to feel comfortable. In effect, the museum was being downright rude to its visitors.

Steadman also feels that, in many cases, museums lack common sense as well as common courtesy. After a recent visit to the Philadelphia Museum, an institution he has visited many times, he was bothered by his own disorientation, which resulted from the rapid progress through media, styles, and centuries that is typical of a museum visit. Museums seem to be setting up an either-or situation in their discussions about serving visitors: either you give them labels everywhere, or not at all; either we have fifteen audio tours, or none. This kind of polarization is damaging to the investigative process, Steadman feels. To think more objectively about the visitor experience, museum professionals must find a way to get inside the visitor's head.

Steadman cited Barbara Martin's account of her own visit to a national park as analogous to the nonexpert museum visitor's experience. Museum professionals do not experience national parks in the same way that botanists and geologists do and probably would not appreciate having vast amounts of technical information forced on them. However, they might appreciate a few minutes of personalized explanation, including a few pertinent geologic or biologic details. This analogy should help museum staff members better anticipate the kinds of experiences their visitors might prefer, such as a number of short and varied encounters with art objects. At the very least, the national park analogy should encourage museums to experiment with different approaches and processes in order to determine which are most successful and most popular.

Conservation may be an aspect of museum work of particular interest to visitors, and yet this work is rarely presented to them. Many visitors cited an interest in artists' statements about their works; these could be made available through written and audio materials. In addition, materials could be offered that compare and contrast two important paintings or sculptures.

Short videos could discuss different approaches to individual objects. On the whole, Steadman feels that museums should not line themselves up behind a single approach; rather, they should try different approaches and adopt those that work best.

Returning to the focus groups, Steadman agreed with Rose Glennon's earlier proposal that museum professionals remove the pane of glass separating them from the visitors. In addition, he pointed out that the museum's own staff is an important constituency, and one that most institutions ignore. The observations of everyone from directors to secretaries to guards can be invaluable aids in defining and describing the ideal visit and in reexamining institutional assumptions about the museum experience.

Summary of General Discussion

Danielle Rice found it encouraging that all the speakers had looked to their own experience to better understand the museum visitor's experience. However, **Richard Brettell** commented that museum work is unlike his previous experience teaching at a university, in that there is no immediate feedback, no student response or course evaluations to give the museum professional an indication of his progress or effectiveness. He believes that one reason for the "wall of glass" between museum staff and visitors is that the staff is virtually invisible to the public, their presence indicated only by the gray areas on the museum map. The problem may be architectural, with the space itself creating an internal communication problem by separating staff from each other and from the public. The layout of The Art Institute of Chicago, which was built at the turn of the century, is among the best in the country, Brettell feels, in terms of staff communications and visibility. He expressed deep frustration that, having joined the museum world to have his work affect large numbers of people, he has no way of gauging how his efforts are received.

Roger Mandle agrees that the influence of architecture on the relationship of the staff to the public is a basic issue. Most museums have organized themselves in a way that implicitly communicates the idea that the staff considers its most fundamental obligation to be to the object, as if the presence of visitors were an embarrassment. In Minneapolis, there was an attempt to design the curatorial department so that it has access to the galleries. This encouraged visitors to come in and ask questions right at the point of contact with the art. Unfortunately, the experiment scattered the curators around the museum and hindered their internal communication. Still, Mandle feels that the art institution's mission should be carefully reexamined in order to overcome the fragmentation and overspecialization that characterizes most museum staffs. What is needed is a renewed sense of the whole.

James Wood would like to see more museum professionals who, like Brettell, have substantial teaching experience prior to their work as curators and directors. He hopes that the current teacher/curator division is being overcome.

Bret Waller is concerned that the museum's teaching responsibility is not being asserted strongly enough. There are certain things that must be known about works of art before they can be properly understood, and the professional's job is to tell the truth as he or she knows it, not to present palatable half-truths, even if market research indicates that that is what the public wants.

Rose M. Glennon's response to the opening question was that museum professionals should not feel that they must give people what they say they want. She pointed to the nation's school system, which, by giving students what they want, has produced a generation of cultural illiterates. She proposed that a more useful model would be that of the medical profession, which listens to patients and then diagnoses the problem. Ultimately, the goal is to have a more informed patient who can then enter into a richer dialogue with the professional.

Mandle observed that no one had proposed adopting what would be the most radical stance on the opening question: abandoning existing collections in favor of Leroy Nieman if that is what the public wants. He wondered if those present were avoiding addressing the subject as fully as possible in an effort to protect their traditional priorities. He questioned just how far they were willing to let public demands affect their institutions. **Joseph Rishel** countered that he was glad to know that certain aspects of traditional and canonical standards are still being defended and that "quality" remains a major criterion in museum work.

Lewis Sharp feels that museum professionals are less prepared than any other group to take on the responsibilities of their positions, because so few of the problems of curating and museum management are ever addressed in art history departments. As long as the academic departments in which most museum staff receive their training remain unsympathetic to museum work, their graduates will be unprepared to assume professional responsibilities.

One aspect of museum work that needs more attention, according to **Mandle**, is the cultural diversity of modern urban America. To be truly public institutions, museums must be more mindful of their role in interpreting culture.

Claudine Brown was deeply disturbed by much of what she had heard in the colloquium so far. The public is still being discussed as if it were a homogeneous community, which it clearly is not. Simply posing the question, Must we give the visitors what they say they want? is tantamount to admitting that people do not mean exactly what they say. Brown believes that when visitors ask for more information, they are asking for *meaning*. Most people do not know how to use the institutions effectively; they do not know whom to ask or where to go for help. She compared museums to libraries, where people must learn to use the card catalogues and the numbering systems. When they need help, they speak to a librarian. Yet even the most educated and affluent visitors do not know how to get information from the museum and its staff.

Agreeing with Waller that the public should not be presented with half-truths, **Brown** insisted that more thought must be given to human development, to the skills that visitors bring to their museum experience, and how those skills can be improved. She noted that most curators and educators bring their own prejudices to their work and, consequently, find many objects that they neither appreciate nor understand. It is important, therefore, to be sympathetic and respectful of the incomprehension and confusion of visitors and to try to provide information as objectively and unobtrusively as possible.

RESPONSE

Moderator: **Anne d'Harnoncourt, Director, Philadelphia Museum of Art**
Discussants: **Henry Hawley, Chief Curator of Later Western Art, The Cleveland Museum of Art**
Patterson Williams, Director of Education, Denver Art Museum
David Steadman, Director, The Toledo Museum of Art

Summary of Reports from Breakout Group Leaders

This session was devoted to hearing from each of the five breakout groups, in numerical order, starting with Group One, which was led by Linda Downs and Jay Gates.

Group One: Jay Gates and Linda Downs, Leaders

Jay Gates reported that his breakout group produced many excellent ideas, but in no particular order. The participants noticed that the focus group process led them to entertain solutions to their problems that they would not have thought of previously. One of these was that collaboration must be facilitated among the museum staff, something that may be easier to accomplish in smaller institutions. Gates observed that at his home institution in Seattle, regular staff retreats have been a successful innovation. They have allowed interdivisional communication to flow more freely.

Throughout their discussion, Group One attempted to deal with museums in a larger, more conceptual way, rather than tackling individual problems that might differ from one museum to the next. Many participants had doubts about the information they had received from the focus groups, although they had no doubts about the value of the dialogue that the process provoked. Limitations stemmed from the incomplete and idiosyncratic nature of the focus group data, which may be overly influenced by group dynamics. However, understanding these limitations, the information can be used in an informed way.

At one point, Gates's group indulged in what he described as "rampant existential introspection" in an attempt to tackle the metaphysical problems of the museum. They concluded that, unlike their counterparts in art education and art history, museum professionals must focus on the aesthetic experience as their primary mission. The comments of visitors from all parts of the country regarding the museum as a peaceful oasis were very heartening for this group. Less encouraging was the repeated insistence by visitors that they need more information, skills, and vocabulary to make the museum experience meaningful.

The group members agreed that one of the best ways to do a better job of meeting visitor needs would be to adopt a more rigorous review process for the services provided by the museum, so that labeling, exhibitions, and educational programs could be regularly evaluated and reassessed. In addition, it was felt that the communication, collaboration, and networking that were such an important part of the present colloquium should be continued and expanded in the future.

Group Two: Deborah Schwartz and Patterson Sims, Leaders

Several specific issues were discussed in this group, but two in particular occupied the foreground, Patterson Sims reported. One of these was the interrelationship of the curatorial and educational functions of the museum. The other foreground issue was how best to communicate exotic cultures.

Deborah Schwartz remarked that the relationship of the educator to the curator, and how that relationship affects interpretive materials, was an issue of great concern to everyone in the group. Every museum represented had instituted some form of team approach to these issues and had experimented with labeling, didactics, and textual materials in a collaborative process. The group also discussed innovative programs at other kinds of museums—for example, how science museums work through the same problems. The participants also felt that museums need to pay more attention to the quality of the written word, making sure that only excellent writers are given the task of writing for the public. Finally, everyone felt a need to return to and renew his or her personal commitment to the museum's agreed-upon mission, which must be kept in focus when new structures and programs are being developed. There was strong, unanimous agreement that museums should be flexible, that they must not box themselves in with structures that do not make the best use of staff abilities.

The focus of the group's second meeting, said Sims, was the problem of interpreting and communicating "exotic" cultures. *Exotic* was defined for the purposes of discussion as everything that fell outside the category of post-1500, Western two-dimensional art. The group agreed on the importance of acknowledging the insecurity of many visitors as they come into contact with non-Western artifacts. They also discussed how educators' assumptions can get in the way of clear communication. Sims noted that exotic cultures often make special demands of exhibitions, since they are likely to produce three-dimensional objects, which require a different treatment than paintings. The use of theatricality was viewed as a possible asset, but also as a potential detriment to the integrity of the exotic art object.

The issue of art versus anthropology came up frequently, particularly in regard to the visitors' understanding of what type of museum is best suited to house a particular object—for instance, why one would place an object in the Field Museum of Natural History as opposed to The Art Institute of Chicago. The group realized that trial and error may be the only way to discover the best way to present unfamiliar objects. They recognized that while the East Coast museum visitors tend to look to Europe as a frame of reference, West Coast visitors are more likely to look to Asia, which calls upon a different set of assumptions in regard to presentation. Cross-cultural and thematic approaches to presentation merit further exploration, but it is important not to overlook the inherent problems.

Finally, the group acknowledged the fact that museum professionals, particularly directors, are predominantly male, white, and homogeneous in most respects. As Alan Newman pointed out, why should museum professionals expect visitor reactions to be highly varied from museum to museum when the people who run the institutions are so similar? Demographic shifts have moved the formerly *exotic* into the mainstream, and the concept of the *mainstream* is changing radically.

Group Three:
Robert T. Buck and William J. Burback, First-Day Leaders
William J. Burback and Katharine C. Lee, Second-Day Leaders

William Burback began by stating that although he had come to the colloquium feeling somewhat like a victim, this feeling had completely disappeared. He felt that the combination of personal and professional insights had been remarkable and highly rewarding, but he was not sure whether this was due to the mix of curators, administrators, and educators, or to the influence of the focus groups.

Katharine Lee explained that on the first day the group went around the table and voiced their most pressing concerns. Some wanted to know how to help visitors prepare for their museum visits so that they would be empowered to get more out of the experience. Others wondered what information was most useful to visitors and how it might best and most unobtrusively be supplied. How does the museum environment relate to the experience of the art? What changes are required in the educational and institutional structure?

The following day the group agreed that the kind of professional contact that the conference was providing should be continued. They felt that the personal and intimate exchanges instigated by the focus groups provided momentum and fueled enthusiasm for tackling problems. They also suggested that the circle be widened in subsequent meetings and that an educational journal or some other forum for expressing problems and suggesting solutions be created. Above all, the group wanted to define a project that would sustain the intensity of the present series of meetings. It was suggested that the eleven participating museums should develop experimental installations or exhibition-related projects, such as an audiovisual orientation, aimed at specific target visitors. These projects, which would be funded by the host institutions, would include evaluations and postproject studies, and would be reassessed after two years.

Overall, Lee felt strongly that the most important result of the focus group process was the sense of connection and communication. This easily could be lost without continued efforts.

Group Four: Nancy Berry and John Schloder, Leaders

Nancy Berry described her group's first session as informal and wide-ranging. The participants decided to divide the discussion into two areas, the first addressing issues brought out by the focus groups, the second addressing important issues not touched on by the focus groups. The focus group issue that everyone agreed was the most compelling was the dual plea for orientation and more information, and the participants spent a great deal of time trying to develop strategies to meet this challenge.

The difference between information and meaning was approached in terms of both human and machine interventions. One suggestion was to train guards as guides, but this was not widely supported by the group. More popular was the idea of "zone guides" or "surrogate friends"—for example, making graduate students or docents available to visitors, but not intruding on the visitor's choice to explore the museum independently. These guides could offer advice and serve as a source of information to the staff as well. Serving this function might be a form of museum apprenticeship, with the guides required to know the museum collections, programs, resources, and special events. Technological resources and labeling also were discussed, including the use of computers. Here, however, the lack of body language and voice contact was felt to be problematic.

Among the issues not raised in the focus groups was the alarming possibility that museums may be more homogeneous than was previously thought. Another was the issue of the cost of different approaches to museum management. The financial aspects of various choices must be discussed, Berry feels.

Group Five: Rose M. Glennon and Lewis Sharp, Leaders

Lewis Sharp noted that his group elected to spend some of its time at The Heard Museum in Phoenix, a well-curated and highly focused museum devoted to past and present Native American culture. This small museum has both permanent and temporary exhibitions and addresses both cultural and art-historical issues with a wide range of information systems including tours, audiovisual materials, and an excellent labeling system.

There also is an exhibit devoted to the Heard family and their acquisition of the collection. Sharp is disturbed that in their concern about individual objects, too many museum professionals lose sight of how their collections were formed and how they grew. To a community, a collection is more than a set of objects; it also represents the work of people who have made a commitment to a geographical area and its history. The group members agreed that museums should feature many different types of presentations. These should be continually renewed, and information should be presented in a flexible and multilayered fashion.

Sharp felt that while the focus group was of inestimable value to the participants, it would be difficult to communicate its value to those who have not experienced it firsthand. For many in the group, the instigation of dialogue across disciplines and work areas has been the most significant and useful aspect of the process, and that communication has to be sustained to keep alive the insights and energy generated so far.

Summary of General Discussion

Anne d'Harnoncourt asked **Patterson Williams** to speak further about her extensive personal experience with focus groups. Williams replied that her institution has conducted focus groups on a variety of subjects. Examples include asking people to take apart the museum newsletter and paste it up in a different order and interviewing people about their reactions and preferences in regard to exhibitions that are to be dismantled and reinstalled. Most recently, the museum asked a focus group to design an ideal museum.

Evan Turner observed that the conference was revealing new attitudes toward the public on the part of museum professionals. He surmised that this is related to the fact that those at the top of the museum hierarchy are, on the average, about ten years younger than the same group would have been a few years ago. These new leaders came of age in the 1960s and are thus far more comfortable challenging orthodoxies and reexamining traditional procedures.

Turner wants to have museum boards of trustees become more involved in the ideas and concerns that seem to be motivating the conference participants. **Jay Gates** reported that his institution is sponsoring a joint retreat for the senior staff and board at which museum problems will be addressed. Both **Katharine C. Lee** and **Roger Mandle** feel that while trustees are willing to engage in more theoretical issues, they usually are presented only with the more mundane financial and logistic problems of the institution. Yet, as Mandle pointed out, board members, as community leaders, can offer a broad perspective on a museum's problems. **Kent Lydecker** observed that many trustees encounter the institution with the same naiveté that visitors bring to the experience, but the familiarity of board members with the commercial and political arenas can make them valuable community allies.

Mandle noticed that there had been very little discussion of how other community institutions might be called in as collaborators to help solve some of the problems that museums face. The burden of preparing people to have significant aesthetic and educational experiences cannot be borne by museum staffs alone. He suggested enlisting schools, colleges, and universities as allies in this endeavor.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR INDIVIDUAL MUSEUMS?

Moderator: **Roger Mandle, Deputy Director, The National Gallery of Art**
Speakers: **Alan Newman, President, Alan Newman Research**
Neil Harris, Department of History, University of Chicago

Summary of Remarks by Roger Mandle

Roger Mandle explained that his opening comments would address the challenge of projecting the results of the present conference forward, as the participants return to their home institutions and begin to face the problems that have been raised during the focus group process.

Change was the keynote of the entire conference, as evidenced both by the participants' acknowledgment of the audience's stake in the quality of the museum experience and by the unanimous recognition of the museum's responsibility to its audiences. The statements from Dallas and Boston were particularly strong in these areas, while Cleveland expressed concern about the feasibility of providing "something for everybody." There, the primary focus is on the repeat visitor. Philadelphia is committed to exploring new ways of getting nonvisitors to attend the museum. What is clear from all these responses is that museum professionals are becoming much more highly sensitized to the needs of visitors.

These sessions also have reconfirmed staff expectations regarding the importance of the aesthetic experience, and many have reaffirmed their commitment to facilitating the "flow experience" in response to the work of art. Mandle reflected on Neil Harris's designation of the current museum era as one of "existential scrutiny," an era in which there is a new interest in asking fundamental rather than peripheral questions about the museum's function. This is reinforced by new concerns with emotion, volition, and belief, and an interest in providing meaning, not just information. While today's art historians are preoccupied with *deconstructing* the art object, museum professionals are attempting to *reconstruct* and enhance the connection between object and viewer.

Rethinking, reconsideration, and reexamination are processes that are referred to repeatedly in the reports. They are being applied at all practical and theoretical levels of museum management and operation. New trends are being signaled, and a new strategic vision of museums and their function is being developed. This new vision includes long-range plans for staff and trustees to become more involved in museum education and the use of outside support people, such as environmental psychologists and information specialists. Some institutions will be bringing in research firms for five-year planning processes and statistical projects.

Community resource committees, minority advisory committees, and trustee task forces are being developed in an attempt to bring different levels of the community into the museum management process. Many conference participants have spoken of shifting priorities in recognition of a new and wider sense of responsibility to the community, as well as the need to draw on the expertise of people outside the museum in order to fulfill goals and implement programs. A new collaborative style of team management was evident in all the reports; curators and educators are beginning to work together for the benefit of the museum and its visitors.

Ongoing evaluations, by staff and by the public, and the regular testing of long-held assumptions were frequently cited as important elements in addressing problems of accessibility and attendance. Some museums are advertising in nontraditional media and targeting new audiences, while others are trying to remember that it is impossible to appeal to everyone.

There has been substantial discussion of the differences between orientation, direction, and information and how each can lead to meaningful experiences. Videos, maps, guides, signs, and new orientation galleries are being planned at many museums to address the straightforward issue of orientation. But helping visitors find meaning in their visits is a more complex matter; it requires closer attention to the visitor's experience with art and to the development of critical audiences who are empowered with interpretive skills. Outside the issues of information and meaning were the issues of physical comfort, amenities, and the good manners required of the museum in its role as host. Finally, the use of new technology, particularly videos and computers, was mentioned as an area for future investigation.

Mandle believes that the fundamental issue continues to be the "peak experience" that only some visitors enjoy: what can be done to help more visitors achieve this? Many participants are seeking to answer that question by examining their own personal experiences with art. Museums are beginning to work *with* the public, not just *for* it. Though they still define their role as one of providing public access to art, they now recognize the diversity of that public. Serving as a cultural center in a multicultural age is a complex challenge.

Major changes have occurred in the last year at the National Endowment for the Arts, signaling difficult times to come. In such a climate, educating the public about art becomes an important means of defusing the misunderstandings that abound about the artist's function in society.

There were some issues that were not addressed in the group reports, but which Mandle considers very important. There was no mention, for example, of museum training and the future of the profession. The topic of multicultural audiences was barely touched on, and collaboration with other cultural institutions was completely ignored. Very little attention was given to the problem of shrinking financial resources and the difficult choices that this will force museum professionals to make in the years ahead. In all of these areas trustee input could be very helpful, and Mandle was surprised to hear so little about the integration of trustees into the museum management process.

The pressures and problems faced by society as a whole—racial, urban, familial, political, cultural, and economic—all of which are relevant to internal museum problems, received hardly any attention at all. Nor was much time devoted to discussing the tensions between curator and educational staff, between the staff and the public, or to the question of leadership within the staff. Finally, there remains the important question of who the visitor should be and where the primary emphasis should be placed in attracting new visitors and allotting scarce resources.

In conclusion, Mandle suggested that although the value of the focus group sessions was primarily intangible and subjective, this should be viewed as a strength rather than as a weakness. The process calls for discipline and tenacity on the part of everyone present, and Mandle hoped that a year from now all would look back with pride on what they had accomplished.

Summary of Remarks by Alan Newman

After fifteen years of working for a variety of organizations, Alan Newman wanted to stress the importance of actually using the findings of such a project as this. Too frequently, in reencountering former clients, he has discovered that their project results have been filed away and not acted upon.

In regard to the present project, he noted that he had never before seen such a dramatic change in a group of participants as a result of the focus group process as he had seen at the present colloquium. He recalled noting in his opening presentation that one of the goals of that process is to stimulate interdisciplinary dialogue and to serve as a team-building technique. He felt that that goal had been achieved, which speaks highly of everyone in the room.

One of the activities that Newman has encountered often over the years is what he calls "moderator bashing," a form of killing the messenger. This had not happened during the present conference, and Newman found that remarkable. There were, however, some understandable concerns about report writing, given the difficulty that a person outside a discipline may have in writing for professionals. Fortunately, focus groups are not completely dependent on written reports for their success; just as important is the direct experience of the data. Moreover, beyond focus groups, there are other methods of doing audience studies, and Newman encouraged the participants to consider using these alternate methods at their home institutions.

Summary of Remarks by Neil Harris

Almost every type of public institution and profession is undergoing a major reconstruction of its foundational logic and its relationship to the audience it serves, Neil Harris began. Museums are not alone. At his own university, for example, he has been involved in medical ethics issues and the relationship between doctors and patients. Many doctors have been reevaluating their own attitudes and the expectations of patients through a process similar to that employed in the Getty project. It is not clear whether optimism or anxiety is the reason for this new inward-looking trend—in the medical profession, at museums, and in many other fields—but Harris feels that it is somehow related to better-articulated institutional goals.

The notion that museums and other specialized communities are passing through analogous phases is important in establishing the connection that ties together a whole range of social enterprises. Yet, along with the similarities, clearly there must be a number of differences among various institutions around the country and around the world. During the conference, Harris was struck by the fact that so few participants mentioned the cities in which they worked. This meant that there was little discussion of place-specific needs, and Harris found this disturbing. Although in his own talk he had emphasized the recent shift to phenomenological concerns, he wanted to make it clear that phenomenological goals such as the flow experience should not supersede all the other goals and functions of a museum, including those related to locale.

Harris found it remarkable that no one spoke of the effect of the museum on the larger community. When most American museums were founded, in the nineteenth century, there was a naive faith that they would have a major impact on public taste. If the museum is to continue to exert an influence on society, decisions must be made regarding the type, direction, and scope of that influence and what connection the museum is to have with community values and aspirations. When visitors come to a museum, they should know what position that institution represents in the larger community.

The politicization of art was another topic not discussed at the conference, as Roger Mandle noted in his opening remarks. Museums originally were intended to be countercultural, in the sense that they were anticommercial. There has been no discussion of how such a stance—one of opposition, hostility, or criticism—might affect a museum's ability to attract an audience.

The topic of architecture, though it came up from time to time, needs more attention, particularly in regard to the relationship between environment and perception. Completely overlooked was the relationship of the art museum to the fabric of the city, in particular its public spaces and public art.

Even after the discussion of the flow experience, Harris was still not clear about what constituted a successful exhibition. He wondered if the goal was quantifiable in terms of attendance or, instead, a more qualitative and critical matter, and he did not feel that the question had been resolved in the consensus group reports.

Little had been said about the choices forced on museums by budgetary constraints, a topic that Harris felt most likely had been purposefully avoided. Yet, choices are important tests of an institution's commitments. For example, it is clear that in the future a larger number of staff members will be involved in making decisions, and one issue that needs to be addressed is whether a larger portion of the budget should be allotted to staff requirements. Retraining guards and hiring new guides will be an expensive undertaking, and it will not be accomplished without affecting some other area. Does it make sense to limit museum hours further to achieve a more intense visitor experience? Harris is curious to know what sacrifices—of hours and staff—would be acceptable to implement new programs.

Harris was surprised to hear so little substantive critique of visitors, some of whose comments he found appalling. Our culture consists of mass media, the schools, and other culture industries, some of which have more influence on people's lives than others. It might be useful to have a focus group in which staff members discuss these influences with visitors.

Harris was curious about the relationship of the museum store—for some visitors, the most memorable part of their excursion—to the larger context of the museum and its exhibitions. He also was curious about how museums might use public relations and advertising to increase attendances.

Given the fact that entry-level museum personnel are the future of the profession, Harris wondered why so little had been said about training. Nor had the discussions given him any sense of the relationship of the museum to the business community or to the schools. Historically, art museums brought in artists to introduce visitors to the logic of materials and the technique and character of the works on exhibition. It is also a tradition that students will develop their own interest in art made by others through the experience of making art themselves. These lines of thinking should be examined in future focus groups.

Endorsing Mandle's comment about trustees, Harris noted that he had served as a trustee at several institutions. He finds it ironic that, although usually one is chosen as a trustee because of one's interest and involvement, many trustees have less contact with an institution's programs after their appointment. Harris suggested that increased board involvement would be best accomplished through committees with specific tasks and assignments.

Summary of General Discussion

Neil Harris's discussion of the museum's role in the community reminded **Anne d'Harnoncourt** of the debate that erupted in Chicago over the proposed demolition of the stock exchange building. The Art Institute mounted an exhibition and became actively involved in what ultimately was an unsuccessful struggle to save the historic building. This kind of involvement is too rare, she feels. As a child visiting the Museum of Modern Art, she gained a sense of the power of art to transform every aspect of daily life, and she misses that sense of the museum as a place with a mission.

Recalling that the purpose of the present conference was to focus specifically on the nature and quality of the museum visit, **Roger Mandle** reminded his colleagues that the visitor experience provided a fundamental opening to a wide range of experiences and responsibilities. These include the idea that an artwork functions extra-aesthetically as a signifier of another culture and carries historical information.

Although admitting that he had been embarrassed by the number of topics left out of the discussions, **John Herrmann** suggested that inherent in the focus group methodology is the goal of narrowly identifying a specific agenda and discussing it in depth. The value is that even given the small sampling of visitors and the diversity of locations, certain themes and concerns were reiterated, providing common denominators for future action. However, in concentrating on the common strands of visitor reaction, it is easy to lose sight of the needs of the atypical visitor.

Katharine C. Lee observed that most museums today tend to resist the concept of the museum as a place with a mission and a shaper of taste. They prefer to see themselves as a resource. The discussion of the flow experience pointed out that museums are becoming less presumptuous about their visitors. Museum professionals are beginning to recognize—and trying to understand—the cultural diversity of today's audiences. **James N. Wood** agreed, noting that the "existential scrutiny" to which museums are subjecting themselves has resulted in a shedding of the missionary and tastemaker roles in favor of a more service-oriented conception of the museum. The problem with this new approach is that diverse audiences are far easier to respond to than to lead.

Danielle Rice pointed out that a museum's various constituencies do not carry equal weight in the power hierarchy of the institutions, and the focus groups have concentrated on the least empowered and most numerous segment—the audience. Harris's question about what constitutes success in a museum exhibition reminded Rice that critical approval, not popularity, is the gauge. This brings up the question of who is being represented by the critical establishment. Art critics, as has been made clear by the recent controversy surrounding the National Endowment for the Arts, do not reflect the attitudes and opinions of the majority. When museum professionals write about and curate exhibitions, they tend to assume that the audience will be made up of people like themselves. The power inequity that exists among museum constituencies implies that exhibits might look very different if the range of cultural diversity in the entire potential audience were reflected in the museum staff.

Patterson Williams was intrigued by the comments about the mission of the museum. She noted that at the Philadelphia Museum of Art she was always aware of the institution's historical tradition of promoting good taste and industrial design. She has found it more difficult to get a sense of the Denver Art Museum's historical sense of mission. She also took to heart the message communicated in the book *Museums for a New Century*, which stressed the importance of cultural pluralism. At the Western Museums Conference, which focused on cultural diversity, considerable conversation was devoted to the Eurocentric notion of "taste," which still affects the way objects from other cultures are chosen and shown. These issues provoke difficult intellectual questions about the museum's role as upholder of standards and its conflicting role as promoter of different cultural traditions and values.

Harris's comment on the relationship between museums and businesses caused **Bret Waller** to reflect on the roster of colloquium participants, which consisted of directors, curators, and educators. At least two of these categories constitute the core decision makers of any museum; these individuals have the ability to shape the futures of the institutions they lead. As these institutions become more complex and more difficult to manage and are forced to compete for resources, other specialists—whose talents are in great demand in the private sector as well—are becoming increasingly important to museum operations. To enlist the needed computer and financial experts, for example, museums must offer salaries competitive with those offered by for-profit businesses. The same demand does not exist for curators and other art specialists; museums are their only job market.

David Curry observed that the structure of the museum tends to inhibit the evolution of leadership, which in contemporary conceptions is linked to paternalism and monolithic authority. Yet the empowerment of other constituencies seems to call for a redefinition of the concept of leadership.

Returning to the issue of priorities, **Deborah Schwartz** acknowledged that there is constant pressure to allot the bulk of a museum's diminishing financial resources to the preservation and exhibition of art rather than to education and public access. Clearly, public access will be meaningless if the works and facilities deteriorate. She feels that installation and community outreach should be seen as a continuum and that museum staffs should not succumb to the temptation to neglect one side of the museum's commitments in order to make the institution more attractive to funders.

Considering that this was a conference about visitor attitudes and experience, **Nancy Berry** wondered why there had not been more discussion of learning styles and teaching methods and the current research that has been done in these areas. Nor had the topic of training been given much discussion, **Rose M. Glennon** added. She noted that the educators had entered the focus group process with a low estimation of their own importance in the museum hierarchy. When she reflected on the experiences that had made her a good museum educator, it occurred to her that more important than professional training per se had been the nurturing she had received from senior colleagues, those who made her feel that her contributions were consequential within the entire museum structure.

Charles Moffett offered some observations from the perspective of the curator, noting he had served in this capacity for over twenty years in four museums. From the beginning of his career, he noticed a split between the curatorial and educational staffs, a split that he feels is still in effect at the National Gallery. He has had a number of differences with educators over the years, but he feels that there is a lack of appreciation and respect on both sides. His own opinion is that educators must become curators and curators must become educators if tensions over turf are to be overcome. If he had to describe himself in general terms, he would say that he is a guardian of the ideas and ideals contained in the objects that the museum houses. The key to improving the museum experience for visitors is to bring the educational process and the curatorial process closer together.

As an educator, **Linda Downs** believes that the best way to achieve what Moffett is calling for is through teamwork. She recommended that the frequent informal discussions during which staff members analyze exhibitions and critique brochures should be formalized in a team-project format.

Anne Bromberg was disturbed by the authoritarian implications of the widespread perception of visitors as unenlightened beings who need to be steered along the correct path by museum staff. More than half the members of her visitors focus group were African-American or Hispanic, and without exception, all were articulate and receptive individuals. When museum professionals speak of "enlightening" the museum audience, there is a clear assumption that they are themselves enlightened and that the visitors are not. This is not the case, and Bromberg urged museum staffs to spend more time making friends with and nurturing their audiences as articulate, intelligent individuals worthy of respect.

Disagreeing with Moffett, **Lewis Sharp** warned that when curators try to become educators and educators try to become curators, people are not doing the jobs they have been trained to do. More often than not, the problem is that curators who trespass in the educational domain do not allow educators to do their jobs properly.

Rice was grateful that the colloquium was enabling museum educators to assert themselves. Validation in the eyes of directors and curators will allow educators to be more effective in their jobs.

Kent Lydecker felt that much of what had been talked about in the last two days had to do with validating individuality. By validating the point of view of the visitor, the conference participants were also giving greater validity to the point of view of the educator, the curator, and the trustee. The next challenge is to synthesize theory into action. The authority of the institution must be reclaimed from the press and the advertisers, who together have usurped the public imagination.

Bonnie Pitman-Gelles remarked that, in contrast to other conferences she has attended, this one had been comfortable and easygoing, perhaps too much so. She reminded her colleagues that, to prevent the colloquium from becoming an elite and rarefied event, they must share the proceedings with the larger museum "family," which means actively reaching out into the community. She warned that museums are entering a cycle in which severe budget cuts will require a real commitment to education departments, which, along with other service-oriented departments, are the first to be cut in a crisis.

Although **William J. Burback** was moved by Moffett's advice that professionals should come together, Burback pointed out that effective teamwork requires that there are distinct positions and areas of expertise. People who are not alike make the best team players.

In contrast to Pitman-Gelles, **d'Harnoncourt** found the proceedings more stimulating than comfortable. In a number of cases, the focus group results did not tell museum professionals what they wanted to hear, and she viewed this as positive. She suggested that, ironically, the comfort level enjoyed by many conference participants actually may have resulted from "shared discomfort." Although many people would leave the conference with anxieties, they also would take home the knowledge that they have friends who share their anxieties.

Downs warned that Harris's historical revelations about the changing priorities of museums seem to place today's professional in a precarious position. As audiences become better educated, they must be seen more as peers than as wards, which calls traditional approaches into question. Although Downs has always approached her work with a kind of missionary zeal, the focus group responses imply that visitors see the museum as a haven, as an escape from the world. The outreach of the 1960s not only brought visitors in; it also has expanded the range of the museum staff's responsibilities.

Claudine Brown views her fellow participants as a pessimistic group. After beginning the sessions with the assumption that there is an enemy without, now they are contemplating the enemy within. In her opinion, a powerful group of individuals had come together for this colloquium, and everyone should regard the themes of self-empowerment and coalition building as major accomplishments of the meeting.

Jay Gates was encouraged by the finding that so many visitors consider the work of museum professionals to be important and valuable. Their main complaint was that the professionals do not communicate their message clearly enough. Museum staff members should take comfort in the fact that their work is valued and concentrate their efforts on articulating their institutional mission.

Schwartz threw out the practical question of how to convey the insights and discoveries of the conference to those who could not attend. She wondered if people were planning staff meetings for this purpose. **Mandle** noted that the participants would learn in a later session about the distribution of the final conference report. **Evan Turner** reported that in his breakout session, participants had discussed holding focus groups that would include board members, curators, and educators. The goal was to involve trustees in the thinking process, but these meetings also would include educators and curators who had been unable to take part in the process. **Patterson Sims** said that a series of informational staff meetings would begin soon at the Seattle Art Museum, followed by a larger marketing task-force meeting that would include trustees and educators.

In response to a query from **Mandle**, at least ten participants indicated that they had shared the videotaped focus group sessions with people who had not participated in the project, and six said they were planning to use them as explanatory tools in additional meetings. **John Walsh** reported that his staff had edited their tape down to a more manageable length and had added some voice-over commentaries; the revised tape was proving to be an effective resource.

Glennon recommended that other museums be encouraged to conduct their own focus group studies rather than simply to watch the existing tapes and read reports. Perhaps a workshop could be set up for the next AAM (American Association of Museums) meeting to serve as an introduction to focus group techniques.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE FIELD?

Moderator: Evan Turner, Director, The Cleveland Museum of Art
Closing Remarks: John Walsh, Director, The J. Paul Getty Museum

Summary of Remarks by Evan Turner

Addressing the final session of the conference, Evan Turner explained that he had deliberately prepared nothing beforehand. His plan was to step back and give an off-the-cuff response to the conceptual issues raised during the sessions, which he felt had been successful in identifying the key issues that will occupy the museum education field in the years ahead. Among these are censorship, the end of the great international special exhibitions, the waning of aggressive large-scale collecting, and the grave budget crises facing America's art museums.

Almost half of those present were under forty-five years old, and most of these individuals would still be working in the field twenty years from now. In light of that fact, Evan proposed to make some predictions for the year 2010 and the future of museums as educational institutions. He hoped that his forecasts would help the participants prepare for the major decisions they will be confronting during the next two decades.

Environmental problems will continue to mount. The atmosphere is becoming more and more polluted, and this is having a perceptible effect on the earth's climate. In Dallas, currently there are nineteen days each year during which the temperature exceeds 100 degrees. The estimate for the year 2010 is seventy-eight days. What quality of life can be expected twenty years from now? Clearly, the problems of environment and climate, which include acid rain and the depletion of the ozone layer, will be an inevitable part of the fabric of cultural life.

Turner cited the deteriorating quality of public education in the United States as another major crisis. Twenty years from now, museum professionals will no longer be able to count on even the current level of sophistication common among today's audiences; yet, the level of visual sophistication will be on the rise as a result of the visual mass media. In addition, the American enthusiasm for obsolescence has meant that the object as such has little importance because of its brief existence; such an attitude may well undermine the mystique of the art object in the future.

Another factor that will have an impact on the life of every American in 2010 is the national debt. The profligacy of the past decades will have to be paid for, and fundraising for museums and other nonprofits likely will be far more difficult. Related to this is the fact that America is on the decline as a superpower and is yielding its former preeminence to Asia, which will be profoundly damaging to the American psyche. Most important, a demographic revolution is under way; by the turn of the century, the nation's major cities will find that people who have long been considered minorities will have moved into the majority.

Although some of these predictions may be somewhat frightening, Turner feels that the future holds challenges that will only make museum education far more exciting than in the past. The potential for new audiences with different, but no less valid, points of view is particularly inspiring, as was evidenced in each focus group's having at least one nonvisitor who was genuinely moved and engaged by his or her first museum visit. The museum's Judeo-Christian cultural orientation inevitably will change, requiring new criteria for evaluating objects and standards of excellence. The demands of these new approaches will stretch the field of museum education to its maximum potential.

Turner is confident that, armed with the museum educator's greatest resource, the work of art, the colloquium participants will be able to meet and surmount these challenges. Artworks, with the wisdom and history they carry, will always serve as a resource for grappling with the terms of human existence. To achieve the goals that clearly are shared by all, the participants must follow through on their responsibility to communicate the knowledge they have gained during this conference to their colleagues in the field.

Summary of Group Discussion

Bonnie Pitman-Gelles noted that, although there are a number of traditional avenues for sharing professional knowledge, including journals and conferences, the real point of this conference was the sense of empowerment it had instilled in the participants. **James N. Wood** suggested that the best way to share this was for the participants to set the best example possible for their colleagues. If only half of the museums represented can make full use of the ideas and insights gained at the conference, important progress will have been made.

Turner reminded participants that the focus group project was yet another example of the Getty Center for Education in the Arts' awesome commitment to museum education. He asked for suggestions regarding additional initiatives that the Getty might sponsor in the future. **John Schloder** feels that there is still too much groping in the dark when it comes to museum visitor studies. Information must be disseminated to the people who need it, and a set of critical standards should be established to guide future studies by the many museums who so far have not explored this area.

Patterson Williams, noting that she and Katharine Lee were on the planning committee for the next AAM convention, expressed concern that curators seldom attend that convention. She finds the lack of discussion about collections at these conventions appalling; the proceedings often degenerate into a convention of technocrats who talk about how to do many things, but not about art and its qualities and meanings. She wondered what could be done to get curators more involved and to address collections and audiences' possible experiences of them.

Patterson Sims pointed out that museums are run by consortiums of professionals, not simply by directors. The Getty colloquium organizers recognized that reality by forming interdisciplinary teams. This team approach brings out the differences in opinions, approaches, and priorities that are present in all museums and strengthens their problem-solving abilities. Sims further observed that the conference participants represent not only the leadership of the American museum world but also a social and educational elite, when compared to the general population. The homogeneity of museum staffs may force some difficult decisions in the future; the exclusive club of museum professionals must open itself to a more diverse, more representative membership.

Jack Meyers, who administers museum grants in the Getty Grant Program, pointed out that his program, which is open to a wide variety of projects, takes very seriously a museum's own articulation of its needs and priorities. He noted that museums have not taken very good advantage of a special category for interpretive projects, perhaps because the structures needed to carry out this kind of collaborative work are not sufficiently well established within museums. Proposals are eagerly sought by the Getty Grant Program for all phases of a project, from planning through completion. And because the Getty Grant Program, unlike the National Endowment for the Arts, has no formal deadlines and reply dates in this grant category, its staff is able to work with museums over a period of time in developing their proposals.

John Walsh asked Meyers about the role that focus groups might play in the development of interpretive projects. **Meyers** replied that his office would be happy to see projects related to the permanent collection developed as a follow-up to the focus groups. The key would be to integrate the surveys and interviews into the context of the museum's interpretive activities.

Roger Mandle suggested that the Getty Grant Program, unlike any other funding organization, is in a position to affect future leadership in the museum field through the funding of training and apprenticeship programs. It might very well address the need to establish new networks and new access for young people of different backgrounds to the museum profession. **Meyers** responded that while training is not a current cateogry, the Getty Grant Program is eager to hear more from the participants on the issue of training.

Kent Lydecker reiterated the need for what he called "linkages." In any stack of grant applications there will be six or seven institutions that are grappling independently with the same problems. Without links, achievements in one institution cannot be utilized by another. Lydecker suggested that this stems from the isolated nature of the collecting process, which is difficult to translate between institutions. This is quite different from the interpretive process, however, in which knowledge and understanding can be readily shared.

Mandle regretted that there were not more budding museum professionals present at the conference, so that the concerns and visions expressed could have been communicated across generations. He is convinced that without a more effective, multidimensional system of training, the sense of isolation and dislocation will be perpetuated from one generation to another.

Walsh asked about the future of the present group. With the publication of the reports and the conference proceedings, the project officially comes to a close, but there seemed to be a great deal of interest in keeping the project going in some form, through teams engaged in separate projects that later would be evaluated in a group setting. **Evan Turner** agreed that some kind of follow-up session would be very helpful. He suggested that finding out what efforts had been made, and which had succeeded or failed, was just as important as generating the ideas in the first place. While some individuals probably would communicate among themselves, it would be unfortunate if no formalized group discussion took place to assure that the greatest number possible benefit from single experiments in the future.

Sims suggested it would be worthwhile to conduct a survey of the participants during the next six months to find out what new approaches and programs people choose to tackle immediately. **Mandle** recommended piggybacking a future reconvening of the present group onto some other meeting that was already planned, such as AAM.

Duke reminded the participants that two years ago they had supplied Patterson Williams with copies of surveys that had been completed at their institutions. This material has been reviewed and summarized, and a report will be forthcoming. In this way, useful surveys can be studied and duplicated at other institutions.

Summary of Closing Remarks by John Walsh

At the beginning of the conference, John Walsh had expressed the hope that many issues would be raised, debated, and resolved during the course of the participants' four days together in Phoenix. He began his closing remarks by noting that his hope had been fulfilled. As a result of the colloquium, he felt fortunate that he had chosen to do museum work for a living and reassured that museums are the magical and transforming places that he had always believed them to be. He was moved as well by the empathy and heartfelt eloquence that the participants exhibited when talking about their visitors and their commitment to them.

Walsh did not shy away from acknowledging that participants had expressed some misgivings about the uniformity of the study and the upbeat conformity of too much of the focus group testimony, which suggested to some that the visitors were overly anxious to tell museum professionals what they wanted to hear. He sensed some alarm over the fact that visitors seemingly want to be told what to think and what to do. The problems of visitors' deference to authority and their insistence on a single correct answer to the challenge of the art object are of concern to every educator. On the other hand, Walsh enjoyed learning that some visitors are wary of explanations provided by experts on modern art; they prefer to hear from the artists.

The element of social class can no longer be ignored, and Walsh reminded the participants of the confusion and hostility that can be triggered by the omissions and assumptions of museum professionals. He was both startled and charmed by the revelation that museums sometimes are bad hosts; all museum visitors deserve civility and respect.

Walsh commended Neil Harris for consistently providing invaluable historical insights into the work that one does every day. This allows museum staff members to recognize that they have a meaningful contribution to make to the larger stream of history. Harris's sketch of what was not addressed at this conference provided an important map of issues that must be kept in the foreground as the participants return to their work.

The focus group methodology has shown itself to be a useful tool for understanding audiences, particularly because it involves the collaborative process. Walsh agreed with Evan Turner that this project has revealed that the museum world is now at a crossroads. Much has been lost, such as the centrality of the object and universally acknowledged standards of quality. Viewed in a more positive light, however, perhaps the centrality of the object has been replaced by the centrality of the encounter; perhaps quality, once defined solely in terms of the object and connoisseurship, has come to refer also to the quality of the visitor's experience.

REPORT: WHAT DID THE FOCUS GROUPS REVEAL?

By Alan Newman

It is a pleasure for me to be here with all of you this morning, to be able finally to look you in the eye, rather than have you watch the back of my head. It has been a long and intensive marathon getting to this conference—I have earned more than 150,000 frequent flyer miles—yet being here has been a highlight of the past several years.

It was over two years ago that I met Lani Duke, Kent Lydecker, and Danielle Rice in Washington to discuss the applicability of focus group research to art museum visitor studies. They were on a fact-finding mission and my firm had been recommended by Harold Skramstedt at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.

Alan Newman Research was then a ten-year-old market research company that specialized in the travel, tourism, and leisure industries. Our clients included most of the nation's theme parks, Walt Disney Productions, Mystic Seaport, the PGA and its member clubs, Colonial Williamsburg, and, of course, the Ford Museum.

Our emphasis for all of these attractions has been on studying their visitors—everything about them:

- who they are,
- where they live,
- where they eat,
- what they look like, and
- how they experience attractions.

At that time, Alan Newman Research was conducting scores of visitor focus groups each year. Lani, Kent, and Danielle told me that they were interested in exploring focus groups because they believed them to be an active, participatory research process rather than a passive one. A primary issue, they told me, was providing an arena in which directors, educators, curators, and other museum professionals could share the experience of learning about their visitors.

The first set of groups was conducted in Chicago in December 1987. I approached this project, as I would later learn, with the same sense of intimidation as first-time art museum visitors approach their first visit. But, like them, I was initiated quickly and relatively painlessly. The Art Institute project provided my first insight into the roles of the various museum professionals whom I had heard about in Washington. The project was a success, and we proceeded to schedule the other ten museums.

Shortly after completing my work at the Art Institute I was in Chicago for another client and I met Kent for lunch. I had just finished work at the Cleveland Museum, and I was sharing with him my perceptions and excitement at the project's reception. At some point during our conversation, Kent told me that when I finished all eleven museums I would have a broad and very current insight into the operations and politics of America's art museums and that I should probably write an article for *The New Yorker*. Well, Kent was right about the insight, he was just wrong about where to publish it. As I have told several of you, I should probably be in *Rolling Stone*.

My purpose today is not to present edited videotape that you have seen before or read endless quotes from actual groups that you have read before. Nor will it be to single out specific museums for praise or criticism. I have another form of torture in mind. I intend to share with you the project's objectives, discuss the focus group method, and present a summary of findings common to the eleven participating museums.

Objectives

As I mentioned earlier, a major objective of this project is centered on *process* rather than *product*. Many of you have heard me refer to it as the Marshall McLuhan approach, where "the method is the message."

From the outset, a primary goal has been to evaluate the appropriateness of focus groups for the study of the behavior of art museum visitors. An important component of this objective has been the method's ability to stimulate interdisciplinary communications and problem solving within the museum. These objectives will be measured, I am certain, by the success or failure of this conference. Our comments and participation here are the principal measures of this objective.

Other project objectives are more *result* specific. Throughout our reports to you and the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, we have consistently identified three of them:

1. to identify staff expectations about a museum visit and their impressions of the public's expectations about art museums;

2. to identify public expectations and compare them to both staff expectations and actual visitor experience; and
3. to explore visitors' educational insights from museum visits.

Let me pause here for a second to say that this has been an innovative approach to the use of focus groups. The innovation comes from making the process participatory through the involvement of the "people behind the mirror." The process has been just as important as the substance, as reflected by these objectives. Substantively, we have learned a number of things important to you and your visitor, and procedurally, we have found that focus groups are a useful alternative to more passive quantitative techniques. When I have finished, I think that you will agree that the data are very rich. The next steps—if any are to be taken—require delving more deeply into one or more of these broad findings.

Methodology

Twelve years ago when I first left academia and started Alan Newman Research, a colleague tried to explain focus groups to me. Having come from a quantitative background—voting behavior studies—I thought what he was describing sounded like gobbledygook, and I quickly termed it "mother-in-law" research. I swore that my new company would never utilize such fuzzy methods. Over the intervening years I have learned that focus groups are indeed mother-in-law research, but that mothers-in-law are oftentimes appropriate sources of information.

What are focus groups, and how do they work?

1. They are a qualitative research method that has been used in market research for the past fifteen or twenty years and is currently quite fashionable. Unlike surveys, which provide numerical information and are often projectable to a larger population, focus groups are impressionistic. They are designed to be meaningful and provide insights into the attitudes, values, and opinions of consumers. They are not projectable. The results are a function of the skill of the moderator and the insight of the analyst. There are no correct or incorrect findings from focus groups and there is no such thing as a sampling error.
2. Participants are selected on the telephone, in a quasi-random manner so that they represent agreed-upon characteristics. Selection is not designed to make the sample meet statistical criteria.

3. Selected individuals take part in a group discussion among ten to twelve people.
4. A trained moderator provides direction for the group by following an outline—or moderator's guide—that is developed in conjunction with the client.
5. Focus groups are held, as most of you are aware, in special facilities equipped with a conference room for the group discussion and an observation room behind a one-way mirror for clients. Facilities also are equipped with audio and videotape recorders.

As a qualitative research method, focus groups have a number of important attributes that stimulated the Getty Center's interest.

1. They are insightful. It was hypothesized that the use of focus groups would provide a new understanding into visitor expectations and experiences at the participating museums.
2. Focus groups involve the staff as participants in the process. Watching groups from behind a one-way mirror is an effective team-building activity.
3. Results from focus groups are easily understood. Observers do not need specialized education or statistical training.
4. Focus groups provide a degree of realism not found in quantitative research.
5. Finally, results from focus groups are readily believed because you hear them from the horse's mouth.

The process that was used to conduct research at the eleven participating museums consisted of two types of focus groups. The first were internal, staff groups, called *consensus* groups. They have been given this name not because they attempt to achieve consensus among the participants, which, as we all know from our own experience, is difficult, but rather because they attempt to achieve a consensus on the objectives of the project. Consensus groups at participating museums consisted of professional staff and, in some cases, board members, who were selected by the project coordinator—usually the director of education. The objectives of these groups were

- to achieve "buy-in" and support for the project;
- to identify the types of consumers to be included in the "outside" focus groups;
- to design the assignment that participants would be asked to complete while visiting the museum; and

- to identify the staff's perspectives on the educational and experiential role of the museum.

Following the consensus group, *two pairs* of external focus groups were conducted with consumers. One pair of groups was conducted with visitors to the museum and the other pair with nonvisitors—or in some cases people who had not visited since childhood. Staff members who participated in the consensus group attended the visitor focus groups as observers behind the mirror.

Each pair of consumer focus groups consisted of

- first, a preliminary group session, during which expectations about a museum visit were discussed;
- second, a visit to the museum, during which participants were asked to see specific galleries identified by the staff in the consensus group and to keep a written diary of their visit. They were provided with a gallery map but with no other orientation information prior to their visit.
- finally, a follow-up focus group to discuss participants' actual experiences and how they compared to their expectations.

An optional sixth group consisted of another consensus group with museum staff who had taken part in the process. Held a day after the second set of visitor focus groups, this group facilitated the synthesizing of observations and the formulating of the internal museum agenda. We integrated this consensus group into the process at the Cleveland Museum, and I believe this simple addition enriched the project.

Findings

During the time remaining to me this morning, I want to review what we have learned from this project, which I think is considerable.

From our eleven consensus groups, we learned that you, the professional, want visitors to *have positive, meaningful experiences and leave with the desire to return*. You said that visitors approach museums from a variety of backgrounds and that *everyones museum experience and the meaning they derive from it will be different*. Your view—expressed in almost every consensus group—is that individuals should experience museums in whatever way they find most meaningful. I feel that this perspective resulted in very vague expectations. It was, I feel, difficult for staff to articulate concrete and measurable visitor-based objectives.

There were, however, several consistent expectations expressed across all museums, some more specific than others.

- Many of you felt that some objects, never specifically identified, would arouse intellectual curiosity and inspire additional learning about artists, eras, and schools of art.
- You want visitors to "connect" emotionally with specific objects.
- You want the experience to be educational.
- You hope the experience instills pride in the community and its art museum.
- You want visitors to feel welcome and comfortable. One professional identified his museum as "user friendly"—a term I never heard again.
- Several people went so far as to say they want visitors to realize that they are seeing original works of art that were created by men and women.
- Some of you expected that people would find the museum a special place where they can be introspective and escape the everyday world.
- And finally, you expected that visitors would be struck by the uniqueness of the museum and the variety of objects in the collection.

How do your expectations compare to the experiences of focus group participants? Let's examine visitor experiences and compare them to your expectations.

Even though many of your expectations seemed vague to me, they were articulated in much the same language by participants, who said, *the museum experience is meaningful and rewarding for all visitors, and they intend to return*.

Notice how consistent it is with the staff expectation. Obviously the two are consistent because we wrote both, but qualitatively the sentiment of both visitors and staff is reflected in these phrases.

Equally consistent with your expectations, the experience was individual. There were nearly as many experiences as there were people in the project. By and large, participants, regardless of previous visitation, were "struck" by the variety and uniqueness of the collections.

The most universal experience was the educational nature of a visit. Both first-time and repeat visitors told us that their visit promoted an understanding of, or interest in, history or culture. This was true, in one way or another, for almost every person that we spoke with during this project—even the most dogmatic nonvisitor.

Make no mistake, the objects were the primary focus of the experience for everyone. First-time and repeat visitors had the same focus, but different experiences. Usually they were awestruck by the size, variety, intricacy, and beauty of the works in the collections, regardless of museum. Everyone was fascinated, to one degree or another, by the same things: artist, subject matter, technique, color, media, school of art.

Many participants shared with the group, or with me in their diary, experiences in which they had a special connection with an object. A first-time visitor to the Getty Museum said:

> *Spring* was the most breathtaking piece of art I have ever seen in my life. I just sat there and looked. It was totally incredible. I got chilled ...that isn't even the word for it.

A frequent visitor to the Philadelphia Museum said:

> I would just stare. Sometimes you could see sadness in some and joy in others. Some paintings just denote survival. There were just certain communications you could receive from certain paintings. It was eerie, but you just couldn't rush by.

Many visitors also found the museum to be a special and reflective place to visit...an oasis. Numerous people made comments about the peacefulness of the galleries, the building, and the grounds. In fact, these were important reasons for visitors to return to the museum.

Although repeat visitors approached the museum visit with a feeling of comfort and control, first-time visitors expected something quite different. They tended to think of, and experience, art museums as intimidating and said that this emotional state inhibits visitation. Their intimidation manifests itself in several ways:

- Many participants said that they would be unable to understand and appreciate the objects because of their ignorance of art. They think that everyone who visits museums is knowledgeable. Thus, they are timid and self-protective in their expectations and behavior. When visiting they are likely to be unwilling to or incapable of asking for help. They believe museums will not provide information to help them learn.

- Many people believe art museums are for the upper classes only; they think that they have to dress up to visit art museums and this makes them uncomfortable.

- They are unaware of specific museum offerings and do not know if there is anything they would be interested in.

- They think of museums in the same way they do libraries and believe they are inappropriate family activities, because you cannot talk.

In addition to intimidation, several other reasons were given for not visiting art museums, which I thought would interest you. Many of these same reasons are responsible for nonvisitation at other very diverse leisure attractions. They include no time, no interest, an inconvenient/bad location, and no awareness.

Lack of awareness must be underscored. Primarily nonvisitors, but also frequent visitors, said that a big reason for not visiting was a lack of knowledge about the museum—its offerings, its location, its educational programs, and its current exhibits. In larger metropolitan areas, nonvisitors—like visitors—were aware of "blockbuster" exhibitions that received media attention, but they knew little else about the museum, its permanent collection, or its program offerings. Participants said that without "top of mind" awareness about the museum, their attention was drawn to other, more competitive leisure attractions such as science museums, zoos, and theaters.

Although first-time visitors approached their visit with trepidation, they found that the experience itself was much better than they had expected:

- It was less intimidating;

- It was more interesting;

- The size and variety of the collections exceeded their expectations;

- They spent more time at the museum than expected;

- And in all but two or three instances, they told us they were likely to return for another visit.

- They became more comfortable!

Indeed, the visit of both first-time and repeat visitors exceeded expectations—by some so much that they said they intend to return soon. But although experiences exceeded expectations, all visitors shared the same concerns about the quality of their visit and how it could be improved. They indicated that learning was inhibited because of problems with orientation, information, and direction. In fact, both of the differences that we have identified between your expectations and the experiences of your visitor—intimidation and inhibited learning—are manifested in these three areas: orientation, information, direction.

Orientation was identified as a problem at all eleven museums. All visitors said that they want more introductory information about how to organize their visit, what to see, and how the museum is arranged. Participants said that a broader-based or more complete orientation would help reduce intimidation and/or promote learning.

First-time visitors especially want to see important objects—those by famous artists—highlighted so that they will not miss them. Several people suggested brochures in conspicuous places presenting "highlight" tours. As you might guess, this suggestion has provoked spirited debate among observers. Many repeat visitors reinforced this perspective, saying that their visit as part of this project was enhanced because of the assignment that they were asked to complete.

Several first-time visitors completed their visit and assignment with questions about the originality of the objects. One first-time visitor to the Denver Art Museum asked us:

> Is everything original in there or are there some copies? I just imagine that every museum can't have a van Gogh or Picasso.
>
> There's just not enough to go around, so I imagine they'll probably have some copies.

Or, as a Philadelphia first-time visitor explained:

> I know there will either be works or copies of works by the old masters. I don't think there will be any originals unless a collection has been loaned to the art museum.

Visitors said that they want to know more about the museum, its offerings, and its programs. This is, after all, the information age. They said that orientation films are interesting, informative, and often helpful when they are broad in scope and easy to locate.

However, information about the availability of tours and other programs needs to be more readily available and prominently displayed. Generally, participants were unaware that museums offer tours or gallery talks.

Both first-time and repeat visitors told us that they want information—more information—so they can learn about what they are seeing. They told us that when more information was provided, their appreciation of the objects increased. It seems that the more visitors are told about an object and its background, the greater the likelihood of their connection with it.

A repeat visitor to the Getty noted:

> I became aware of how important knowledge is to appreciation. I had noticed Ensor's work but recoiled from it. I wouldn't say that I like Ensor's painting, but I value it now that I understand something about it.

Or from Chicago:

> I get frustrated when I go to an exhibit. I always get the little brochure and it never has enough information. It should have a longer paragraph for each painting telling me what I'm supposed to think about....

Visitors comment that the lack of information is frustrating and detracts from the museum experience. Participants were never quite satisfied with the amount or type of labeling information. The most common complaint was that the type was not big enough. They told us they would like to have information included on the artist's life, the subject and its historic significance, the school of art, background of the culture or period, and the artist's technique. Most important, they wanted to know what makes it an important work of art?

Participants said that gallery notes are a suitable means of conveying much of this information, but they are often unavailable, hidden, or written in language that is too advanced for most people to understand. Art from non-Western cultures requires the most background information, because it is the most unfamiliar.

In addition to labels and gallery notes, preferences as to the best method of communicating information vary. Brochures, self-guided tours, guided tours, audio or video presentations (such as the videodisk experiments at many of your museums), and slide shows were all frequently mentioned.

In short, visitors told us that they want information that promotes learning and reduces intimidation.

Finally, the layout and organization of museums is confusing. This is particularly noteworthy because participants also told us that the physical surroundings—the building and grounds—clearly affect the experience. Indeed, at several museums, the building itself is the primary "top of the mind" image of the institution.

Many visitors told us that they frequently got lost when trying to find specific galleries or objects. They said that most galleries tend to blend together—making it difficult to discern a logical flow from one gallery to the next. Maps designed to aid in orientation are, in many cases, outdated, confusing, or difficult to follow.

Many times participants turned to guards for direction. By and large, the guards were not friendly and did not position themselves to offer assistance. The presence of guards actually reduced comfort for some visitors and increased intimidation for many first-time visitors.

Orientation, information, and direction—these are the areas where visitors believe that their museum experience could be improved.

I hope that in the short time I have had this morning I have provided you with a sense of the types of concerns expressed by the participants and the richness of the data collected from this project.

In more than 132 hours of focus groups over the course of the past two years, we have spoken with more than 220 visitors and approximately 115 professionals about their museum expectations and experiences, and we have written more than 750 pages of summary. You were able to observe or take part in many of these sessions and perhaps have identified issues and concerns different from those that I have just discussed. That is one of the strengths of this process. Having seen all of the groups, I want to emphasize an important point. There was remarkable consistency across all eleven museums on these findings.

I encourage you to share with each other during these next few days the details from your own museum. I am certain that my outside perspective has focused my attention on certain areas, while yours might be on others. I know that I have only touched on some of the important findings from this study.

Finally, I want to thank Lani Duke, the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, and all of you who participated in this project for permitting me this glimpse into your profession. You have all been open and candid in your comments and participation, which has made this project a success. This has been a great project for me to work on and I want to thank you for it.

NOTES ON ART MUSEUM EXPERIENCES

By Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

My task this morning is to reflect on the *Museum Focus Groups Summary Report* (prepared by Alan Newman for the participating museums) in light of the research on the aesthetic experience that my students and I have conducted over the past years with museum professionals and collectors of fine art, to compare the findings of the two studies, and perhaps to provide some kind of a synthesis based on these very different surveys sponsored by the Getty Trust.

As you shall see, it is my impression that the two studies, one describing how professionals encounter works of art, the other exploring how audiences encounter art museums, are complementary and mutually enlightening. But before getting down to the task of comparing what the two studies found, it might be useful to make a slight detour to provide a theoretical context for what is to follow. These theoretical reflections will apply a social sciences perspective to the question: what is the function of art museums?

The Role of Museums in Society

In answering this question, it will be useful to make a distinction between *latent* and *manifest* functions. By manifest functions I mean the stated goals that institutions are expected to accomplish, while the latent ones are those discreetly ignored goals that no one talks about in polite company, either because they are too obvious or because they are slightly embarrassing. Nevertheless, without taking care of their latent functions, most institutions would soon cease to exist.

Like other cultural institutions, such as universities, churches, libraries, baseball clubs, or symphony orchestras, art museums must exercise financial acumen so as to raise funds for an increasingly expensive staff and physical plant; they must be worldly and fashionable so as to bestow status on trustees and donors; they must have good enough public relations to be seen as sources of civic pride in the community and, if possible, attract tourists to it. To accomplish all this a certain amount of mystification might be required. Museum professionals, like the "priests" of other cultural entities, sometimes must exaggerate the importance of their mission, or veil it in momentous mystery, so as to convince laypeople of the importance of their offerings. Although these latent functions have to be met if art museums are to survive, one hopes they are not the only reasons they exist.

What, then, are the manifest goals of an art museum, the ones that make it a unique institution and justify its existence? Two main functions seem to be preeminent. The first concerns the *preservation and restoration of the best examples of human craft* (or *art*, as the Romans called it). The second aim is *to use art as a medium for communicating aesthetic experiences to visitors*. It is probably safe to say that, historically, the first goal has been viewed as the sole or predominant task of art museums, whereas the second goal has gained in importance only over the past few decades. Correspondingly, a certain tension is built into the staff structure of museums. Curators naturally see the acquisition, restoration, critical appraisal, and proper storage or exhibition of works as the museum's main priority; whereas the educational staff often feels that art objects are primarily a means of communication, and what counts is not necessarily their aesthetic or monetary value, but what the visitors get out of encountering them.

What follows will deal exclusively with the second manifest function of art museums, namely, their task of providing visitors with unique and presumably valuable experiences. This focus is appropriate for two reasons: first, because the properly curatorial functions are relatively better understood and unproblematical; second, because the two surveys under consideration deal almost exclusively with what happens to viewers when they encounter works of art.

Dimensions of the Aesthetic Experience

Both the museum professionals we interviewed, and the audience focus groups agree on a limited number of reasons why encounters with works of art can be meaningful and desirable. Although most professionals are probably well acquainted with these reasons, it might be useful to summarize them once again. The first column of Table 1 includes the four categories we used in our report to the Getty Museum; the second column lists the main categories that emerged in the study of the focus groups. Although the terms are sometimes different, the content of the categories seems to translate rather easily from one study to the other. Apparently the kind of experiences expert museum professionals and visitors report when they encounter works of art share many commonalities.

Both groups speak of the aesthetic experience as having four major components. One is a cognitive dimension through which the art object appeals to prior knowledge and extends its boundaries. Another appeals to emotions that are difficult to express in rational terms, yet appear to enrich our lives. The third dimension concerns the purely visual impact the object makes and the perceptual refinements it causes in the viewer. And the last category includes the ways in which works of art help us understand ourselves and other people by making us reflect on what transpired in the encounter with the work of art.

Professionals and visitors naturally differ in their respective emphasis on these dimensions of experience. Museum curators, especially those with a Ph.D. and those who specialize in classical art, respond to art primarily along the cognitive dimension. They are fascinated with issues of provenance, attribution, and precise location in the artist's oeuvre. The artwork is above all else a glorious intellectual puzzle waiting for a creative solution. Understandably, this dimension of the encounter is much less salient, if not entirely absent, among visitors. Yet the responses from lay audiences suggest that they too would relate to this aspect of the aesthetic experience if they had the necessary knowledge.

Table 1. **Dimensions of Aesthetic Experience Reported in the Two Studies**

From *The Art of Seeing* (Interviews with museum professionals	From the *Museum Focus Groups Summary Report*, pp. 21–30 (Visitors' museum experiences)
Knowledge	Understanding of history and of various cultures
Emotion	Emotional experience—curiosity, fantasy, exhilaration
Perceptual impact	Beauty of objects; stylistic and technical comparisons
Communication	Self-discovery, introspection; personal connectedness with objects; universal concerns across cultures and times

In general, however, visitors do not expect intellectual thrills from attending a museum. They are, rather, hoping for surprise and excitement as they escape temporarily the predictable confines of existence in an environment where the constraints of everyday life appear to be suspended. The more sophisticated viewers may hope, in addition, to learn something important about their own joys and sorrows as these are reflected in the expressive strivings of fellow human beings. Although the term *magic* rarely appears in the sober responses of these two surveys, it seems clear that what the audience expects from an art museum is, above all, a magical transformation of experience.

Cognitive challenges, emotions, visual impact, and empathy leading to self-communication are the "stuff" out of which the aesthetic experience emerges in consciousness, but by themselves these components do not add up to what we mean when we say we had a genuine encounter with a work of art. An aesthetic experience is more than the sum of its parts; in fact, it begins precisely when the various dimensions of consciousness meld together and we are no longer aware of "thinking," "feeling," "seeing," or "communicating" as separate processes. Total immersion in the work of art is the magic experts and laypersons alike hope for when they visit a museum, but rarely attain.

From this perspective, the aesthetic experience is a species of the genus *optimal experience*, which in my studies I have also called the *flow experience*. This is a state of consciousness characterized by intense concentration bordering on oblivion, yet requiring complex mental or physical activity. Various art forms, games, sports, meditation, religious rituals, and mathematical and scientific investigations are among the activities that usually provide flow experiences. Despite the enormous differences in the content of such activities, these experiences are remarkably similar. Both men and women from a great variety of cultures, social classes, levels of education, and ages report these experiences in the same terms.

As an example, I will quote Charles Lindbergh, who uses the analogy of the aesthetic experience of a theatergoer to describe how it felt to fly the *Spirit of Saint Louis* across the Atlantic. But his words are very similar to how Navajo braves describe hunting a deer with bow and arrow, Thai women describe weaving rugs, or Japanese teens describe racing motorcycles:

> It's been like a theater where the play carries you along in time and place until you forget you're only a spectator. You grow unaware of the walls around you, of the program clasped in your hand, even of your body, its breath, pulse and being. You live with the actors and the setting, in a different age and place. It's not until the curtain drops that consciousness and body reunite.

It is my contention that Lindbergh describes not only what it feels like to see a good play, or to fly solo across the ocean in 1927, but also a great variety of other flow experiences, of which encountering a work of art is one. It is this flow that "carries you along in time and place" that constitutes the magic we seek in art, and it is to its closer analysis that I shall now turn.

The Structure of the Aesthetic Experience

To see how the dimensions of knowledge, emotion, perception, and empathy are structurally united in the wholeness of the aesthetic experience I would like to compare an aesthetician's description of the criteria defining aesthetic experiences and my description of the criteria defining flow experiences reported by rock climbers, chess masters, ballet dancers, surgeons, and other such folks. This comparison, presented in Table 2, reveals remarkable similarities.

In both cases, the experience is made possible by the active exercise of powers (e.g., cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and communicative skills in the case of aesthetic encounters) in meeting environmental challenges (e.g., the visual, emotional, conceptual, symbolic residues left by the artist in the artwork). The engagement of skills with challenges requires concentrated attention. This in turn leads to further concentration on the limited stimulus field of the artwork—or the cockpit of the plane, or the baseball diamond—resulting in a focusing on the present moment, on the flow of consciousness, to the exclusion of past and future concerns, or of any mental content extraneous to the tiny, yet fully satisfying, world created by the interaction.

Table 2. **Comparison of Criteria Defining the Aesthetic Experience and the Flow Experience**

Criteria for the Aesthetic Experience* (From Beardsley, 1982, pp. 288–89)	Criteria for the Flow Experience** (From Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, pp. 38–48)
1. *Object focus* "Attention fixed on the intentional field."	1. *Merging of action and awareness* "Attention centered on activity."
2. *Felt freedom* "Release of concerns for past and future."	2. *Immersion in the present* "No awareness of past and future."
3. *Detached affect* "Objects of interest are set at a distance emotionally."	3. *Loss of ego* "Loss of self-consciousness and transcendence of ego boundaries."
4. *Active discovery* "Active exercise of powers to meet environmental challenges."	4. *Control of actions* "Skills adequate to overcome challenges."
5. *Wholeness* "A sense of personal integration and self-expansion."	5. *Transcendence of ego boundaries*; experience is autotelic, or satisfying in itself.
	6. *Clear goals, immediate feedback*

*From Beardsley, M.C. (1982). *The aesthetic point of view: Selected essays*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

**From Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond boredom and anxiety*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This immersion in the ongoing moment frees the actor from the ego-related concerns and defenses that take up so much of our attention in everyday life. Immersion in flow produces "detached affect" because there is no attention left over to worry about what will happen to our precious selves. Yet, paradoxically, as we return to normal life after experiencing this temporary loss of self-consciousness, we tend to emerge with a greater sense of wholeness and integration—a stronger sense of self.

These are some of the similarities between the aesthetic and the flow experience, the broader class of subjective states that people find enjoyable and rewarding for their own sake. But assuming it is true that looking at a painting and, let us say, skiing down a mountain slope provide experiences that are in some important respects similar, we must still answer the question, in what way are the two experiences *dissimilar?* Or, to put it another way, what is the specific difference that distinguishes the act of looking at a painting from skiing?

Activities that provide flow differ from each other in terms of the challenges they present, and thus in terms of the skills needed to become involved in them. The challenges of rock climbing, for instance, derive from the existence of vertical slabs of stone that, given the laws of gravity, make it possible for a person to experiment with actions and related states of being that defy ordinary reality. The *sui generis* challenges of art are very different in kind. They consist in visual representations of a person's unique ideas and feelings, expressed in the symbolic vocabulary of a particular human community embedded in a specific historical period. The skills necessary to engage these challenges involve the ability to decode and recreate—through historical knowledge, emotional responsiveness, visual sophistication, and communicative empathy—some aspects of the process by which the work of art was created. It is through this meshing of challenges and skills that the aesthetic flow experience comes about, and the potential magic of art becomes actualized.

A person who has a high level of skills for decoding the content of artworks needs no help from the museum to achieve this experience. All he or she needs is for the work to be accessible to viewing, and the less fuss about it the better. A friend of mine well-schooled in music prefers to get his Bach directly by reading the written score of a composition rather than by listening to its performance, because he claims he can get a more perfect musical experience without the distractions of a concert hall and of actual sounds. In a similar vein, the ideal visitor would be one so well prepared that he or she would not even need to look at a painting. Given a label and a blank wall, such a visitor could recreate in his mind the work in all its details and partake of the aesthetic experience. Most of us, however, fall far short of such ideal expertise. The average museum visitor needs help to become involved with the artwork.

Historically art museums have evolved as the institutions of a relatively homogeneous elite sharing a common education, similar tastes, and largely interchangeable backgrounds. Museums could take for granted a common symbolic matrix uniting works and visitors. The time for such homogeneity is long past. The ethnic mix of our metropolitan areas is becoming ever more varied, and the kind of education that would prepare a person to interpret a traditional artwork is becoming ever more rare. Even more important than these demographic changes is the change in the museums' attitudes toward their mission. Instead of being content to cater to the elite, museums are now attempting to appeal to a much larger constituency—seemingly coterminous with the entire population of their community. Democracy rather than demography is responsible for the current mismatch of what works of art can potentially offer and what visitors can obtain from them.

If art museums wish to achieve the goal of becoming mediators of aesthetic experiences for the community, they must find ways to facilitate the interaction between the challenges contained in artworks and the aesthetic skills visitors bring to the museum encounter. We might now turn back to the conclusions of the *Focus Groups Summary Report* for some ideas as to how this could be accomplished. None of these ideas will be entirely new to museum professionals, but it may be helpful to summarize them again in this context.

Obstacles to a Meaningful Aesthetic Experience

The *Focus Groups Summary Report* lists a variety of reasons why visitors claim they did not get as much out of their museum visits as they had hoped. The major obstacles listed include lack of orientation to the contents of the museum, insufficient information (e.g., about the artist's life and about the particular work's iconography, art history, cultural context, and technique), confusing layout and organization of exhibits, daunting physical surroundings, intimidating employees, and failure of the museum to communicate the benefits to be expected from the visit.

These items at first may seem like a hodgepodge of unrelated reasons, a laundry list of fatuous complaints. However, if we use the flow model to interpret what these results might mean, it becomes clear that the obstacles fall into reasonable categories having to do with various ways in which the aesthetic experience can be inhibited.

For example, it is difficult to become involved in an activity that will provide a flow experience unless the participant has a clear idea what he or she can do. Clear goals are a prerequisite. Yet most potential museum visitors just do not know what they are supposed to do in front of a work of art. This ignorance not only makes them feel self-conscious and embarrassed but it also effectively prevents all but the most superficial encounter, which remains on the mundane level of everyday life experience. Hence, the visitors list "communication of benefits" and "orientation" as things they miss, and with good reason. What can museums do to help set goals for a meaningful visit? I do not pretend to have the answers, but as Einstein and many others before him have said, having the right question is already half the solution.

Clear goals are useless without skills; to enter the flow state one must use some personal resources to engage the external challenges. Visitors are very aware that they sorely lack the background for getting the full benefit of what they are exposed to. Museum professionals agree that the main preparation necessary for enjoying a work of art is simply having looked at a great deal of art. The more one looks, the more one is able to discriminate and to immerse oneself in what one sees. Past experience settles in memory as knowledge and enriches future encounters. But most museum visitors have not looked long and well enough in the past to see what there is to see. Therefore they list the lack of information as perhaps the crucial obstacle to a meaningful museum experience. They feel that if they know more about the artist, the symbols he or she used, the cultural background and technique, it would be easier to become immersed in the interaction with the work. While the problem is clear, the solution is again not obvious. Museums have tried for a long time now to provide increasing amounts of information to visitors, often to the chagrin of the already informed, who feel that their own experiences are disrupted by the intrusiveness of lengthy labels, voluble guides, and audiovisual aids. An understanding of what makes the aesthetic experience possible, however, should help provide guidelines for how to optimize the conflicting needs of the audience.

Many of the obstacles listed under the headings of "layout and organization" and "physical surroundings" cause problems because they disrupt the concentration necessary for achieving the aesthetic experience. Too many people, too much noise, unclear boundaries between areas, confusing signs and labels are only some of the intrusions that bring the viewer back from the magic interaction to the hassles of everyday reality. Similarly, guards and other employees sometimes disrupt the immersion in the experience by being too conspicuous or rude.

Just because these obstacles exist, however, it does not mean that museums must concern themselves with removing them. There is no necessary step from *is* to *ought*; facts by themselves do not implicate action. Whether one wishes to make museums accessible to an ever wider segment of the population is a matter of choice based on goals derived from values and principles, not from facts alone.

If the goals of the museum do include facilitating the aesthetic experience, then the answers gleaned from the focus groups, as interpreted within the framework of a theory of aesthetic response, provide useful directions for change and implementation. In conclusion, I should like to stress the advantages of a theoretical approach. A good theory helps explain facts, and above all else it allows generalizations from single instances to entire classes of future events that it helps anticipate. For example, visitors occasionally complain of rude guards. Without a theory, one might be tempted to conclude that the cure for this problem was to train guards to be solicitous. But theory helps us see that it is not rudeness per se that is the problem, but the intrusion rudeness provides; hence, one would conclude that solicitous guards could be equally intrusive, and hence problematic.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of a theory of aesthetic response is that it allows for systematic experimentation, for correction as a result of disconfirming evidence, and, therefore, for gradual, incremental improvement. Without a theory, facts generated by surveys tend to have an ad hoc, temporary significance. They might help solve local problems, occasionally they could even lead to generalizations, but facts alone lack the power to explain and predict. Of course, a theory that is not exposed to factual checks is quite useless. Hence, as in all other domains of knowledge, it is through a dialectical interchange between facts and theory that we shall understand better what happens inside museums.

CONCEIVING THE ART MUSEUM: SOME HISTORICAL OBSERVATIONS FOR THE GETTY COLLOQUIUM

By Neil Harris

It is a great pleasure to be speaking to you this morning, and an even greater one to be participating in these days of discussion. The focus group interviews not only are heavily suggestive for policymakers but they also constitute a rich set of sources for all students of museum history. I am grateful to have had the chance to learn more about them.

It is, in fact, the relationship between this current enterprise and the institutional past that I wish to address today. I want to place the project within the larger context of our museum culture and the intricate modern history of surveying opinion and desire. When and why do we ask people what they think and want, instead of giving them what we have or believe is good for them? This is a simple question, but like many another it allows no simple responses. To answer it we have to turn to changing notions of authority and intention and to the complex processes of transmitting and receiving human values that form the very core of cultural institutions.

I have spoken about museum history often to museum professionals, always with a feeling of insecurity that remains undiminished. Some of you here were also in Providence in June when I made one of these presentations. The thrust of my effort there was to emphasize the historicity of current debates and innovations, to point out the lineage, not only of problems but also of solutions, and to indicate the value of studying the responses and initiatives of our predecessors.

Today I wish to employ historical evidence also, but with a different emphasis—in the interest of demonstrating degrees of discontinuity as well as continuity. Along with linkages there are breaks in our management of institutions. The current Getty project is not without ancestry in the world of art museums. I shall try to relate it to earlier efforts and attitudes. But from another standpoint, it is almost unique. Its sponsorship and development, the timing of its appearance, and the interest in its results appear to me to be even more significant than the interview findings themselves, as undeniably important as *they* are. The appearance of the Getty project marks a new stage in the long history of art museum management, a phase that, to my mind, contains some surprising and even disquieting features. Our new information argues for broad changes in our expectations and experiences. And these transformations involve not only our museums but also our larger system of cultural production.

To demonstrate what I mean, I will need to do three things: first, talk generally about American methods of discovering what people think or want; second, say something about how museums have or have not participated in this enterprise; and third, suggest where and how our current study fits in. I will propose four stages for your consideration, four stages of art museum consciousness, four stages in the longer process of self-scrutiny. I find it helpful to create these intervals and to affix labels to them. But they have no purpose beyond that of convenience, an attempt to provide a context for the text that is a museum. I freely admit their arbitrary character. They are not neatly divided. They overlap and bleed into one another. And, to complete my qualifications, I will necessarily be tentative, allusive, and broadly generalizing. Fortunately I can draw upon the extensive research of many others, whose monographs and syntheses I acknowledge gratefully. But I wish, as I start, to emphasize my personal conviction that this is a special moment in the history of art museums and affords an opportunity both to take stock and to think ahead.

Let me begin at the most general level. The art or science of asking people systematically what they think of something or somebody is relatively new. That is because popular opinion itself, as a relevant factor in planning, did not become significant until both the election and the market had achieved their central social roles. Both of these postdate the economic and political revolutions of the eighteenth century. It is not until change and instability of opinion became normal that efforts were made to figure out what people wanted, or if not what they wanted, how they expressed a preference. One of its first manifestations, in the United States at least, came through political polling, what was called, until a few decades ago, the straw vote.

The earliest surviving records of a straw vote involved the presidential contest of 1824—whose participants, I am sure, are familiar to all of you—and was sponsored by a newspaper interested in predicting the results. For the rest of the century many American newspapers sponsored such samplings—the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Herald*, for example. In the absence of scientific sampling theory, they were often quite misleading, but were popular nonetheless, partly because of the gambling that accompanied the campaigns. Pollsters used mailed ballots and sometimes personal interviews. A few magazines, like the *Literary Digest*, also polled opinion on broader public matters, but up through the early twentieth century these polls were sporadic. And politicians do not seem to have relied systematically on polls to test the views of their constituents on current issues.

The other possibilities for opinion testing lay in the private market. The enormous production revolution of nineteenth-century America was accompanied by newly aggressive advertising. Specialists in public taste appeared, who offered innovative packaging and promotional techniques. Even in the earliest years they emphasized the importance of psychological factors in determining what people bought and why. Various rules were promulgated by marketing specialists as the fruits of their learning. Nonetheless, before World War I, with all the new insights and the scale of expenditures, not a lot was known about consumer preference as such, nor were consumers queried systematically about what products and services they desired. Surveys, such as there were, concentrated upon competing types of media presentation—newspapers versus magazines, for example—and a few of the better-established advertising agencies sponsored research departments.

Our first era of museum foundation occurs, then, in the late nineteenth century, at a point when the political and economic uses of opinion making were relatively passive. Polls such as these lacked conclusiveness or consistency. There was little reason, on the grounds of imitating external forces, for museum officials to engage in audience analysis. The basic purpose underlying institutions of high culture was to present the most valued forms of human art. With accessibility, good will, and easy terms—that is, with inexpensive admission, long opening hours, good location, useful labels, explanatory catalogues—the public would eventually make use of these treasures. Further assumptions emphasized the importance of getting to young people, the value of institutional publicity, and the need to make available some useful systems of guidance.

It would have seemed absurd around 1900 to suggest that the overseers—the curators, the collectors, the museum directors—needed to find out what the public wanted. The differences dividing American managers of cultural properties in the pre-World War I years—and there were strong points of division—involved their own valuations and strategies. In the case of art museums, was it appropriate to celebrate the foreign and exotic at the expense of the homely and domestic? Should applied and decorative art get an equal say with fine art? Were original artworks so much more important to purchase and possess than good reproductions? How much recognition should be given to living artists? What was the proper relationship between the school and the museum? Was exhaustive accuracy or aesthetic theatricality a more proper exhibition aim? How many days of the week, how many hours of the day, should museums be open? How lengthy need a label be, how large an exhibition case, how important was overhead light?

These debates, and the others that accompanied them, never implied that the managers did not know what they were doing nor could not accomplish what they sought. They were simply differences of opinion about a broad range of procedures. It was good to increase attendance—museum managers, like orchestra, opera, and theater managers, studied circulation carefully—but there were appropriate ways available to encourage more support—membership drives, concerts, discounts, lectures, free catalogues, bulletins, lively visiting exhibitions, children's programs—and even before World War I, these were all in place. With my own penchant for labels, I would call this period one of authoritarian condescension, with managers and trustees of art museums acknowledging the value of popularity, but not its priority. This was still a producer culture, concerned with finding customers to admire the product, but not designing the product for them. Intuition, logic, personal insight, experience, anecdotal observation—what one might describe as institutional wisdom—constituted the basis for decision making and policy formation through the teens of the twentieth century. One might well spend more time on the bundle of assumptions and aspirations that together constituted the museum mind of this period, for it explains the shape given our early art collections and displays. But I am concerned primarily with its lack of self-scrutiny. This museum culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was one of high intelligence, reflectiveness, energy, and ambition. It contained a spectrum of opinions and objectives and promoted hospitality, education, and community service, among other animating goals. But on the whole, it was self-contained and absorbed with problems of delivery—the standard obsession of a producer sensibility, after all.

The first break in this rather self-confident tradition came in the 1920s, and it came across the board, in business as well as in high culture. The decade of the 1920s has many claims on our attention, but among the most important are its contributions to marketing and display and the origins of many of our best-known consumer habits.

Some of the advances were preparatory and academic. One element, eventually of great influence in museums, was an impressive increase in the skills and self-importance of social science investigators, advances in empirical sociology and experimental psychology that, with improvements in statistical methods, offered more serious predictability than ever before. The 1920s were a decade of tremendous growth for the social sciences generally; economists, political scientists, statisticians, geographers, all believed that the day was dawning when the systematic methods employed by physical and biological scientists could be extended to the social world. This was the decade when foundations moved heavily into the support of scientific social investigation, that saw the creation of the Social Science Research Council and the movement to produce the first *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, the first volume of which appeared in 1930. Professional associations grew in number and influence; so did professional journals. President Hoover, taking advantage of these advances, appointed a prestigious academic committee to report on the state of American life, the Committee on Social Trends. Its investigations would be published the following decade in a series of important texts. My own office in Chicago is in a structure called the Social Science Research Building, dedicated in 1929. The facade bears a quotation, an abbreviated quotation to be sure, from Lord Kelvin, which reads: "When you cannot measure, your knowledge is meager and unsatisfactory." I hasten to add that not all social scientists are in sympathy with the sentiment—there was a hearty debate about the inscription at the time—but it suggests the imperial confidence in precise measurement that was in the air among social scientists of the period.

Although the measuring and analytical programs were applied to many things, there was a second element at work in the decade that made the study of public preference a particular priority. And that was the growth of our communications media, above all, the dramatic appearance of radio. The financial prizes at stake in the competition for vast audiences added new intensity to the search for what people found interesting or attractive. The growth of commercial sponsorship and network programming soon forced systematic investigations upon both advertising agencies and radio executives. Given the size of the listening audiences—tens of millions—it was possible to offer generalizations about taste and to use write-in campaigns and fan mail as a gauge of interest. Movies, whose makers considered themselves more in the tradition of artists than did the producers of radio, did not undertake the same systematic investigation of their audiences. But radio polls and

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listener surveys were dramatic indications of where this kind of research could lead.

Finally, there was the hospitality of private industry to research programs, its willingness to commission, or even house on staff, specialists in understanding what kinds of products, and what kinds of packaging, the public might prefer. It was in the 1920s that the first American industrial designers started to go to work, repackaging familiar products to make them more salable, applying annual changes to automobiles, cosmetics, and household appliances, and generally serving the high-powered salesmanship and installment buying that were characteristics of the decade. Hundreds of American corporations now had their own research divisions, and there were special corporations established by psychologists to service the new interest in determining just what the public was using—not necessarily what it preferred, in the abstract, but what it was willing to purchase. This was a recent pursuit. As one of the specialists put it in 1932, "the literature dealing with the measurement of consumers' concrete wants and their actual buying behavior is so small" that its important texts could be quickly named.

The 1920s were a seeding decade. The 1930s were a flowering one. By then a familiar group of names begin to emerge into public consciousness, the first heroic generation of scientific pollsters. It was in July 1935 that *Fortune* magazine published its first *Fortune* poll, conducted by, among others, Elmo Roper, partner of a market research firm. A few months later a former advertising researcher at Young and Rubicam named George Gallup began to syndicate to several dozen newspapers a poll on a variety of important public issues. The next year, 1936, Archibald Crossley's poll started. There were also the Hooper ratings, devices that analyzed in detail the popularity of particular radio shows. Research papers had begun to expound the value and science of random sampling, a fundamental requirement for the extensive and numerous polling experiments to appear.

In the late 1930s, moreover, these investigators were supported by an influx of distinguished social scientists fleeing Hitler, who would revolutionize approaches to audience study in the decades to come, such figures as Paul Lazarsfeld, Hans Zeisel, and Theodor Adorno. Universities established their own bureaus and offices of opinion research—at Princeton, Columbia, and Chicago. The *Public Opinion Quarterly* began to appear in 1937, followed not long after by the creation of the National Opinion Research Center. In short, the scientific study of behavior and, just toward the end, of opinion, was in an unprecedented state of healthy vigor in the 1920s and 1930s, and it proved to be contagious.

Examining the vocabulary of American art museum leaders in the same period provides ample evidence for this interest in the scientific study of behavior and opinion. Writing in the early 1930s, after almost ten years of investigative work in a group of major American museums, Edward S. Robinson of Yale insisted on the need for experimental education in planning programs and exhibits. We should tolerate "our theories of the intellectual role of the museum only after we can corroborate or alter them on the basis of objective fact," he wrote. While admitting the necessity for patience in answering specific needs, Robinson declared that "sound solution of problems of installation, labeling, guidance, and educational work can be attained only through psychological investigation." We "should like to see museum directors generally become experimental psychologists," Robinson added. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, he, Arthur Melton, Paul Rea, Philip Youtz, Louis Powell, Marguerite Bloomberg, and others supported by the Carnegie Corporation, undertook a series of carefully structured visitor studies and experiments. They were hoping to establish, on an apparently irrefutable basis, a plan of action for museum management and design, one that would eventually increase public visitation and make it more effective.

These efforts, a number of which have been reprinted in recent years and returned to collective memory, were couched in a professional self-confidence that was the equivalent of the amateur self-confidence of the earlier generation. The psychologists—and interestingly it was primarily psychologists and not sociologists who were involved in the work—concerned themselves with universal laws and objective generalizations. Reporting to the American Association of Museums on period installations and their relationship to walking sequences, Arthur Melton insisted that visitor behavior was independent of qualitative differences in the objects displayed. However discouraged curators might be by the thought that an open door was a more powerful motivating stimulus to action than a masterpiece, it was nonetheless an unavoidable—but usable—conclusion. Such "insignificant phenomena as traffic regulations and doors may keep 75 percent of the visitors from experiencing a Rembrandt or a van Eyck," Melton pointed out. These were, on the whole, impact studies, far more concerned with the nature of the environment being visited than the nature of the visitor. But they were aware, at least vaguely, that the museum environment was itself badly misunderstood to the point of actual interference with effective interaction. And they thought they could provide the answers. "What does the public actually get from a visit to the museum?" Philip Youtz, a specialist in library and museum branch operations, asked in 1933. "Few museums have arranged their material in a socially intelligible manner. The average museum resembles a picture puzzle....The public cannot be expected to support institutions which house only an unrelated series of private memorials."

This last comment emphasizes the fact that the museum investigations reached their climax along with the economic depression. Having commissioned their studies, for the most part, in a time of optimism about expansion and with a sense of infinite options to their physical planning, museum officials received the results at a point when their very existence seemed imperiled by the collapse of public funding and private giving. But there was a silver lining. Perhaps the scientific research could serve as a powerful new justification for reorganization in the public interest. By showing that they had figured out how people could make more effective use of their institutions, they could justify appeals for greater tax support. Museums "must emphasize their educational and recreational services if they are to avoid the danger of being labeled in the luxury class," Youtz declared in 1933. Systematic analysis and actual experiment formed the means for improvement. The scientific study of art is an objective and public undertaking, Youtz continued. Americans needed a social classification of art, not an aesthetic one. Quoting Leo Stein, he pointed out that a thrilling street accident outside could empty almost any art gallery within minutes. If the museum or its lecture hall were to compete effectively with that accident, it must be so arranged and organized to catch the deepest curiosity and sympathies of its viewer, it must be an active factor in the visitor's daily affairs, it must draw that visitor spontaneously. And to figure out how, Youtz, like the other analysts of the day, offered social science as a solution, proposing it in the same spirit of certainty that inspired academic theorizers and practitioners. "I am convinced that if the public indifference and antipathy could be analyzed and measured," Youtz concluded, "it would be found to rest in large measure on our outmoded methods of showing objects." Amateurism was aristocratic, he argued; professionalization, democratic. At a moment of financial famine museums were going to have to apply the methods of social science if they were to have any chance of survival.

There were, of course, a series of less positivistic, more humane and insightful suggestions, many of them inspired by John Dewey's writings on art, education, and democracy. Some of the period's analysts pointed, for example, to the lack of contact between museum officials and the ordinary public. "The man on the street has the feeling that museums are too aloof and inhospitable," wrote one. Since child-centered schools had become the norm, why not public-centered museums? Community studies seemed necessary to indicate with precision just who formed the potential audience, to indicate just what kinds of exhibitions were needed. But more than specific insights, one would have to conclude that the interwar years were characterized by a feeling for method, an emphasis upon the need for systematic testing and model building. A period of authoritarian condescension had been followed by a period of authoritarian experimentalism. "There is no place in the world of the modern public museum for . . . nonexperimentalists," Edward Robinson insisted. "Many a man would rather be wrong than have his unverified ideas overthrown."

By the early 1930s, if one had been a student of museum policy, the future of exhibition analysis and audience studies must have seemed bright. Persuasive claims were being made for expertise; foundations were taking a powerful financial interest; museum planners and architects, from Fiske Kimball to Percival Goodman, seemed to be paying attention to visitor needs in a systematic, thoughtful, and progressive manner. Political polls, consumer analysis, and communications surveys, all well developed by the later days of the New Deal, had apparent counterparts in the cultural sector. Lawrence Vail Coleman's massive survey synthesized existing knowledge at the end of the decade. Art museums and academic social scientists seemed to be marching hand in hand on the road to creation of ever-better visitor services, physical plants, and more effective exhibitions.

But, as Joseph Heller remarked, something happened. Or rather, something didn't happen. All this, after all, was during the 1930s. Almost three decades later, confronting an immense expansion of museum building and new foundations, revolutionary changes in mass media, enormously more sophisticated methods of analyzing and then exploiting consumer and electoral markets, museum officials seemed stuck in a time warp. Trying to figure out the meaning of the contemporary museum experience, analysts voiced some suggestions of frustration and disappointment, along with other gestures of encouragement. Duncan Cameron and D. S. Abbey, two analysts who had been helping to make the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto one of the most closely studied institutions in North America, asked in 1961, "Why do museums lag behind commerce and industry in employing the knowledge and techniques of the social sciences in the solution of fundamental problems?" After more than thirty years of investigative effort, museum directors seemed to know little more about their markets than when they began. Cameron and Abbey, as practicing social scientists, concluded that the failure rested primarily on the inadequacy and sometimes even the incompetence of previous surveys, and on a negligent inattention to publication and distribution of results. Certainly there were some centers of activity—Milwaukee was notable—and a number of museums expressed interest in analyzing the demographic character of their visitation. But these remained exceptional.

There were, perhaps, more fundamental reasons to explain the failure to follow up and expand on museum research than the flaws in method of earlier studies. One, perhaps, lay in the overweening self-confidence of the first professional claims, the insistence that an often positivistic social science held out the answers, and all museum officials needed to do was implement them. With the passage of time, some of the conclusions seemed outdated, quaint, or inapplicable.

More fundamental to the deficit, however, was a professional reluctance in the 1940s and 1950s to acknowledge that museums were linked functionally with other social units concerned with market share. The very vocabulary was repugnant. Packaging and promotion had even forced some nonprofit organizations to establish a correlation between what they provided and what was needed. But exemption from the normal course of business practices, from correlating desire and satisfaction, was a primary feature of art museum identity. This kind of exceptionalism made for much of the charm, naiveté, power, or irrelevance of the museum in national life, according to the view of museum influence adopted. It was precisely this indifference or even strong hostility to investigating market and market share that constituted, to some admirers, the glory of these institutions. Unlike so many other things, they at least were not linked irrevocably to some public opinion poll that would dictate the timing and subject matter of the next exhibition or purchase.

I can best express this mood, perhaps, by quoting from a 1945 annual report from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "The Review of the Year 1945" found the previous months to be

> of normal, gratifying progress. Although many of its activities were touched directly or indirectly by the momentous events taking place all over the world, the Museum moved forward on a surprisingly even keel, and consequently there is nothing spectacular to report. This is itself remarkable, because steady progress under such conditions has not been easy.... We like to believe that this achievement is proof of the Museum's inherent stability—a quality that is essential to the preservation of all the high objectives to which the Museum is dedicated. We need offer no apology, therefore, for being normal in abnormal times. Half a century from now should someone, browsing through a library, come upon this report and venture to read it (doubtless an optimistic supposition), our shades should accept as complimentary the exclamation that might be elicited: "Good heavens, the Metropolitan's Annual Report for 1945! and no mention in it of atomic bombs, reconversion, or

labor paroxyms [sic]. Fancy that!" We shall not be ashamed that our true fire has been kept burning, even though its blaze was not spectacular.

My characterization of art museums of the 1940s and 1950s is only a stab at analysis, I confess; we know much too little about their management and philosophies. But the sobering challenge of the Depression, and the lingering influence of authoritarian ideals and traditional wisdom, were still at work, and there was a pride taken in presenting the museum as a foil to the logic of commercial civilization. The palace and temple forms remained, after all, the most common popular symbols of museum legitimacy.

There is one final reason to mention. The experimental studies of the 1920s and 1930s, significant and interesting as they were, had concentrated upon the museum and the exhibition, not upon the visitors. Audience studies were remarkably primitive in their purview, focusing on just a few variables. Museums wanted to know how many came, but they were only vaguely interested in just who they were.

This, however, was about to change. Although there had been, as I've indicated, some museums proceeding with self-analysis in the 1950s, Milwaukee's, for example, they tended to be science museums and not many of them were actively involved. In the 1960s, however, American art museums, in a period of enormous expansion and self-promotion, began to adopt surveying methods with a vengeance. A new phase of institutional inquiry began. Having left authoritarian condescension and authoritarian experimentalism behind, the museum adopted what can only be termed a populist preoccupation, an anxious effort to establish responsiveness to public mood as a basis for action. Market surveys of audience composition and motivation were instituted; museum shops expanded; economic impact statements were launched. The causes for these initiatives were not difficult to find.

One was the massive entry, during the Kennedy-Johnson years, of federal funding through creation of the two endowments, the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, funding that was linked to ideals of service and demonstration of broad constituencies. Support for the arts in the 1960s, while unprecedented in the level of its generosity and the mixed public-private sources, was ideologically oriented, based in part on Cold War claims to the vigor of culture in a free enterprise zone; it was also utilitarian in its linkage of arts renewal to urban growth and benefits. Businessmen and local boosters were increasingly urged to support cultural institutions not simply for the invisible advantages of prestige and moral progress that such organizations brought, but as evidence of enlightened self-interest, since museums and orchestras, like baseball teams and convention halls, enhanced tourism, stimulated investment, and promoted business. The new funders professed admiration for social science research into market services, and, accordingly, many museums joined in.

The entry of public funding was a response to a crisis of expansion and the need for more financial support, so that a second reason for the new self-scrutiny was purely economic: a more aggressive marketing of museum goods and services, best typified by (but not limited to) the expansion of the museum store and the stock of commodities—reproductions, greeting cards, posters, books, toys, games, jewelry—that the art museum featured. Among other responses of the 1960s and 1970s were intensive membership drives, establishment of and increases in the levels of general admission fees, and capital drives, in some cases designed to celebrate the anniversaries of foundation; the 1970s included centennial years for several major institutions. After years of deficits, without much public comment, the director of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts could declare in the revamped and refurbished annual report for 1964, now entitled *The Museum Year,* "The Museum is operating with inadequate space and inadequate funds. It is operating at a deficit." And then he announced the implementation of a Centennial Development Fund, the first in the institution's history. Two years later, after fifty years of free admission, a general admission fee was instituted, "to enable the Museum to keep up with the inflationary spiral and to satisfy the growing demands of the public." And two years after that the chairman of the board of trustees announced, "Funding the Museum's operations is a constant topic of Trustee discussion.... Almost without exception, major cultural institutions from coast to coast are experiencing financial difficulties."

Let me concentrate for just a minute on the budgetary status of the largest American art museum because its history is so well documented and serves as a symbol for so many others. In the mid-1940s the Metropolitan Museum of Art relied on income from its endowment and appropriations from New York City for well over 90 percent of its operating budget. As late as 1965 endowment income provided 65 percent of its budget, with another 23 percent from New York. In other words, almost 90 percent was assured and appropriated. But this would soon change. It might be noted that in 1965 gifts and grants, admissions, royalties and fees, along with cash contributions, all amounted to under 1 percent of the operating budget, and auxiliary activities, including the store, just 4.5 percent. Problems lay ahead, among them, in the 1960s and 1970s, mounting inflationary pressures. In 1972 the Metropolitan Museum of Art ran a deficit of $1.5 million on an operating budget of $13.7 million. To make up for this, during the next half dozen years aggressive fundraising, grant applications, and auxiliary activities, most notably the museum store, moved in to fill the gap. In 1974 endowment and New York City income provided only 65 percent of budget, where a decade earlier they had been 90 percent. Contributions, gifts, grants, and admission fees now made up 20 percent, where they had been less than 1 percent, and store operations almost doubled in percentage to nearly 8 percent. In 1977 income from auxiliary activities for the first time exceeded all other museum income; the figures go from $7.5 million in 1975 to $20 million in 1978.

The point of these figures, and I apologize for throwing so many at you all at once, is to suggest what you already know: that in the 1960s and early 1970s major art museums were entering, in force, both the retail market and the political arena. As a result, it was necessary to appropriate the traditional information gathering employed by both spheres to increase their efficiency of operation. The needs of museum commercial operations clearly dictated new audience surveys as well as innovative programming.

Many were unhappy about the new necessities. In 1971, during his last months in office, the director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, reviewed the lavish publications, arresting installations, and publicity efforts of his institution in its centennial year, and argued that the motives behind such programming were "less to deepen the experience of our visitors than to broaden the appeal of the museum and thus to increase its income. In the financial crisis facing American museums today," he continued, "it is hard for both trustees and staff to evade the pressure to program for income. But, to be truthful, we would prefer to exercise other priorities."

Third, and closely related to these other two trends, museum officers and curators began to respond to more aggressive constituencies who were seeking representation within both the staff and the exhibition policies. The civil rights movement and a series of other consciousness-raising crusades that are still powerful aspects of our social community had many effects on museum management, but one of them was surely a more precise interest in quantification, whether this involved accepting or challenging quotas of various kinds. Again, without knowing more about staff, governance, audience, and exhibition policies from a numerical standpoint, it was difficult either to respond to charges or to establish goals. In some cases, the effort to formulate answers to questions revealed extraordinary ignorance by museums of quite basic data. Filling out grant applications—public or private—required still further information. So did the new development campaigns, which were no longer confined to small groups of wealthy donors, but were massive and inclusive in orientation. It was immediately useful to possess data about income classes, giving patterns, levels of interest, so that more efficient appeals for support could be sent out and better responses made to state attorneys general, civic groups, lobbyists, protesters, and others criticizing museum policies. Audience analysis was made to order.

Again, as the wealthiest, most prominent, and often the most controversial of the great American art museums, the Metropolitan Museum constitutes an example. In 1973 it commissioned Daniel Yankelovich to do an exhaustive twelve-month study of the museum's audience, which not only measured composition but also did some opinion testing. Characteristically, the questions focused upon reputation rather than process, on the esteem in which the museum was held by its visitors, and on the relationship between the relatively well-to-do attendees and the growth of tourism in a city experiencing a basic economic crisis. Yankelovich reported that of the visitors, 89 percent viewed the Museum—on what evidentiary basis is not clear—as one of the three best in the world. The survey found some defects—a need for more seats, a better restaurant, clearer signage—but these were minor elements in what was an enthusiastic endorsement of institutional greatness. The poll also clearly provided ammunition for the continuing war to attract more funding—public and private—to sustain and expand museum services. Simultaneously the Metropolitan, like art museums all across the United States, was raising money for modernized facilities, which included larger stores, lounges, restaurants, lobbies, lecture halls, all to meet the visitor requests that the polls indicated and place the art museum squarely within the cohort of modern, accessible, welcoming institutions.

Within three years of the Metropolitan Museum's study—indeed action was initiated in 1974—Leo Burnett, one of Chicago's major advertising agencies, prepared a general visitor survey and focus group research for The Art Institute of Chicago, one of a series of studies the museum commissioned for discovering more about visitors, where they came from, how they felt about services, why some were members, and what deficits they found. The focus interviews were almost an add-on, result-oriented and summarized in two or three pages. Their purpose was to develop hypotheses "which might better explain how visitors differ" from nonvisitors. Further investigations in the 1970s and 1980s were shared with the Convention and Tourism Bureau, and by the time of its 1983 Awareness, Image, and Impact Study, the Art Institute could report that Chicagoans placed the Art Institute as one of the two best art museums in the world, exceeded only by the Louvre, and followed by the National Gallery in London and then the Metropolitan Museum. Geography and destiny were once again linked.

Issues of community representation, also much on the minds of American museums during this phase, found expression in changes of government, establishment of new trustee and curatorial committees, transformed exhibition programming, collecting and deaccessioning, employee councils and committees, new hiring practices, and dedicated promotional campaigns designed to broaden the socioeconomic base of visitation, among other things.

Not every art museum fully participated in these programs, and not all of the innovations were concerned directly with expanding the constituency, discovering more about its demographic character, its wants, anxieties, concerns. But a sufficient number of institutions did respond and reorganize themselves for this to be significant. If the first phase of museum consciousness was one of self-confident distribution leavened by philosophical discussion and technical innovation, and the second phase was dominated by environmental impact studies concerned with making the museum visit a more efficient and effective encounter with artworks, the third phase was an era of audience investigation, absorbed by issues of reputation and promotion, and making some better accommodation to the multicultural constituencies that were badly represented within both the system of museum government and its corps of visitors. If the first phase could be labeled a period of authoritarian condescension, and the second an era of authoritarian experimentalism, the third might be termed an age of populist deference. Hoping to compensate for many decades of indifference, ignorance or neglect, carefully constructed sample surveys were created, with redefined mission statements and rhetorical commitments to change.

Deference was one thing, and power another. These studies did not always, or even usually, produce dramatic results. In their 1978 examination for the National Endowment for the Arts, Dimaggio, Useem, and Brown uncovered almost 300 completed audience studies for museums and performing arts institutions, an incredible number given the conventional critique that such organizations took little interest in this kind of scientific investigation. And almost all of them were done after 1970, an impressive burst of survey energy. But the authors concluded that the research had only a marginal impact on policy making, ignored when challenging strongly held views, employed selectively, guiding decisions on specific issues like promotional campaigns or ticket pricing, but having as their major functions attention getting, expressive emphasis, and lobbying. In other words, they tended to be ineffective in challenging the basic logic of the commissioning organization and were dominated by highly specific and immediate institutional needs.

I have not analyzed these surveys myself and cannot generalize about their effect. But it seems clear, in retrospect, that most of them were driven by what might be called, without disparagement, marketing needs, and were related to specific institutional deficits of one kind or another. They constitute an important, indeed a vital, phase in the recent history of our museums, but they strike me as different in character and purpose than the current set of investigations.

It is here that I enter on what is the most difficult part of any assessment, placing the present itself in some kind of frame. And also, defining when the present began. During the 1970s and 1980s American museums and museum analysts did not merely commission demographic studies. Some were concerned with bringing together sociological and psychological insights, tracking the museum visit as such, along with the visitor's origins. There was much interest in learning theory, evaluating the educational impact of the exhibition, determining which kinds of presentations made the most lasting impression. It was easier, in some ways, to examine history and science museums in this light than art museums. But some art museums also participated, and these studies clearly were preparing the way for something new. And something new has happened.

As I said at the start, I believe that the focus interviews are at least as important for the sensibility they represent, as for any findings that may accrue. This is because I think they signal a newly supple internal view of the functions and purposes of the American art museum. I am most uncomfortable with providing a label for this fourth and most recent era, but for the sake of consistency I must. Having passed from authoritarian condescension, to authoritarian experimentalism, and then finally to populist deference—and these phrases do not fall liltingly off my tongue—I think we have entered a period of existential scrutiny, one in which the institution stands in an unprecedented and often troublesome relationship to its previous sense of mission. Two questions must be answered: How do the present self-studies differ from those preceding them? And why are these self-studies being undertaken? It is necessary to answer both in order to define the present era properly.

My first observation is that the focus interviews do not appear to be driven primarily by technical or marketing needs. They seem to have, at their heart, a nonutilitarian objective. The fact that they include nonvisitors as well as visitors, that they involve interviewing staff as well as audience, and that they require the active cooperation of museum directors, curators, and educational specialists alike suggests that they are somehow involved with the most central aspects of museum operation. Although they are not without a concern for reputation and incorporate at least minimal identification of class and gender, they are not primarily audience studies in the sense in which these were conceived some decades ago. They are, instead, experiential, intended to reconstruct, as best we can, the quality of the encounters between visitors and art objects, as they are organized and arranged by the host institution and the visitor.

My second observation is that the focus interviews emphasize attitude, volition, perception, awareness, and opinion, rather than actual behavior. That is, they are built around subjectivity and focus attention on what people believe happens to them within the museum, not on what should happen or has happened. Viewing the taped discussions, rather than reading a digest of observations, is vital to their impact. Indeed, there is an apparent indifference, which may distress some critics, to the objective museum visit itself, to measurable behavior patterns that can be examined and, on some occasions, have been examined.

Third, the focus interviews do not, at their center, seem designed to test specific theories or verify hypotheses about the impact of exhibitions or the behavior of the visitors. In this sense they are explorations of what is thought to be happening in the museum, without predictions offered as to possible reactions or disagreements. This lack of specific programmatic bias suggests, once again, an open-ended inquiry into the actual meaning of the gallery experience as it is described by the principal actors. The curatorial comments reveal a reluctance to specify the content or character of the museum encounter, beyond a wish for good things and benevolent outcomes, for emotional reactions and intellectual satisfactions.

Fourth and finally, the focus interviews imply some limits to generalizations. They are not projectable, we are told. Their details, while illuminating some common patterns, acknowledge the complexity of satisfying a mythical average or representative visitor and emphasize the varieties of reaction a single visit or visitor can contain. However thorough the preparations, intentions often seem frustrated by the failure of visitors to respond the way curators expect and by the retention of attitudes that some might think had long since disappeared.

Open-ended, experiential, tied to no specific testing agenda, diffuse, qualitative rather than quantitative, centering upon individual variation rather than typical practice, deemphasizing the authority of the expert host, the current procedures of investigation require a supportive sensibility that is different than its predecessors. Indeed, the enthusiasm for this inquiry suggests that a new conception of art museums and their audiences may be in the process of creation. Too much has been taken for granted about both the wisdom of specialized knowledge and the instincts of popular majorities. The museum experience may well be—as the focus interviews suggest—a continually revised set of transactions between exhibitor and visitor, with constant renegotiations of meaning and value. But as final authority on its own essence, the museum is beginning to disappear as emphatically as the literary text has for contemporary reader-response theorists, and for similar reasons. It is being de-privileged, as throughout our entire culture the canons of taste and the assumptions of scholarship have been challenged and challenged from within. There is no reason to believe that museums can be immune from this, any more than universities, libraries, or medical schools can be.

To me, the radicalism of the present moment and the promise of the present inquiry lie in their willingness to reconceive every aspect of museum learning and experience, to admit the need for phenomenological reconstruction. Perhaps one cause may be, as was suggested here yesterday, that museums face a realignment of resources and ambitions, as collecting agendas contract and institutions are driven back to some of their earliest intentions, before the treasures arrived. No one can deny how remarkable art museums have been as agents of protection, fountains of scholarship, and sources of pleasure. But the impact or the intensity of their most typical and widely publicized function—hosting a visit to encounter objects of art—remains, perversely enough, mysterious. I think the veil is being lifted. When museum professionals can ask what memories or insights their arrangements encourage, when they inquire after the thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and visions of their many guests—and are prepared to face the results—they run the risk of raising basic questions about the logic, efficiency, and sensitivity of viewing rituals long taken for granted. The fact that much is still unresolved suggests a melting away of an earlier solidity that could be smug as well as self-confident.

That is why I think we are entering, or have entered, a new and rather exciting chapter in museum history. The sensibility has not been challenged everywhere, or all at once. The change does not cover everything. But this willingness to endure uncomfortable revelations—and I believe that some of the discoveries are uncomfortable—implies new tolerance for diversity and ambiguity in the structuring of viewer-object relationships. It has taken a long time, some may think too long, for the current questions to be framed and for models of explanation to be constructed. And there will be much disagreement about the lessons to be drawn. But the fact that a new phenomenologically oriented inquiry has begun is, I think, a hopeful sign of our continuing evolution.

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PART III

MUSEUM PROJECT SYNOPSES

The Art Institute of Chicago

The Brooklyn Museum

The Cleveland Art Museum

Dallas Museum of Art

Denver Art Museum

The J. Paul Getty Museum

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The National Gallery of Art

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Seattle Art Museum

The Toledo Museum of Art

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
Katharine C. Lee, Deputy Director; (312) 443-3632.

2. *Project*
The creation of a coordinated art information system for the permanent collections.

3. *Perceived Needs*
Following the opening of our new permanent collection galleries for which curatorial staff produced extensive gallery labels and a new map and directional signage, Focus Groups and other visitors complained that "there is no information about the art." Visitors often found the information hard to locate and some language unfamiliar. They also complained that the information was hit or miss and lacked a consistent overall approach. Some visitors wished for a purpose and felt lost among the many choices presented by the Art Institute.

4. *Project Objectives*
A. To produce fifteen illustrated gallery guides for the following areas: Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Masters; Old Master European Painting and Sculpture; 20th Century Art 1900–1940; 20th Century Art 1940 to the present; American Art 1650 to 1900; European Decorative Arts; the Arts of Africa and the Americas; Architecture; Chinese and Japanese Art; Southeast Asian and Islamic Art; Classical Art; Prints and Drawings; Textiles; Photography; Arms and Armor, and the Thorne Rooms. Texts written carefully for a general audience will accompany fifteen illustrated works that are normally on display. These guides will provide a focus for a beginning visitor moving through the galleries and/or an informative reinforcement to be read following the museum visit.
B. To coordinate the distribution, supply replenishment, and cost control (through grants and a $.25 honor system fee) of the gallery guides.
C. To produce eleven color-coded "You Are Here" maps to the fifteen areas covered by the gallery guides. These will be put in the key transitional spaces. These maps will replace the hand maps and coordinate with the area gallery guide that is available as one leaves the transitional area into the specific collection area.

5. *Project Description*
The Director's Office, members of the Education Department and graphic designers will develop a plan and design concept for a coordinated art information system for the permanent collections. Our recent long-range planning process, a study of visitor response to the present map, and other gallery devices (see "Wayfinding" report) advised that we must reorient our focus toward our audience. Educators will work with curatorial departments to select objects and compose texts. The logistics of map placement, gallery guide stand placement, brochure supply, and retrieval of the "$.25 honor system fee" will be developed with the Director of Visitor Services. At least eight gallery guides and all the "You Are Here" maps are scheduled for completion by July 1991. The entire project will be complete by July 1992.

6. *Estimated Staff Times; Out of Pocket Expenses*
Staff time: coordination, 832 hours; curatorial, 624 hours; education 208 hours; editorial, 416 hours; design, 416 hours. Expenses: eleven maps plus stands, $5,000; construction of eleven stands, $8,000; eight gallery guides, $80,000 (two-year supply); seven additional gallery guides, $35,000. Total budget: $128,000.

THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
Deborah Schwartz, Vice Director for Education, or Missy Sullivan, Manager, Public Programs and Media; (718) 638-5000 ext. 232.

2. *Project*
Programs for older adults

3. *Perceived Need*
As we continue to expand our services to the general public, it is evident that an important priority is to develop programs specifically directed to the needs of older adults. Approximately 35 percent of our current audience are older adults, many of whom are not properly served by the Museum. The less physically and financially independent older adults find Museum accessibility to be limited.

4. *Specific Objectives*
To attract and serve greater numbers of older adults by
A. overcoming existing perceptions of the Museum as being a formidable and inaccessible place;
B. addressing the specific physical and logistical barriers that commonly discourage and frustrate older adults;
C. developing a variety of accessible and engaging programs and materials for this audience.

5. *Project Description*
The Public Programs staff is currently working with focus groups and an advisory board of consultants and colleagues to 1) verify the needs and perceptions of this audience; 2) develop programmatic direction; and 3) begin a network for reaching out to the various Museum constituencies. Beginning in the fall of 1990, the Public Programs staff will hold open houses for directors of senior centers, government agency staffers, and other professionals in the field of gerontology to keep them informed about Museum exhibitions and services. Also beginning in the fall of 1990, the Museum will offer a bimonthly older adult day, providing seniors with free admission to the Museum and a variety of programs, including lectures, concerts, artist demonstrations, and gallery tours. Large-print versions of current gallery guides and labels will be available, and provisions will be made for people with special physical needs. Some scholarship funds will be available for transportation. Additionally, a speakers' bureau will provide on-site lecturers to senior groups that are physically unable to visit the Museum or to those who want more information before they commit to a visit. Evaluation in the form of observation and questionnaires to individuals and group leaders will be ongoing during this first year of programming.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
Staff time: estimated at 250 hours.
Expenses: speaker's and artist's fees, $1,500; bus transportation, $2,000; printing and mailing invitations to groups, $750; refreshments for the open houses and older adult days, $500; speakers' bureau slides, $250.

THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
Deborah Schwartz, Vice Director for Education; (718) 638-5000 ext. 232.

2. *Project*
Artist-in-residence program, a new educational initiative that focuses on contemporary art and artists.

3. *Perceived Need*
Museum visitors are often puzzled or uncomfortable looking at contemporary art. Focus Group participants commented skeptically about the strange works they saw in the Museum's Grand Lobby, where large-scale contemporary works are exhibited. To date, few educational materials or programs accompany the Museum's active schedule of contemporary art exhibits.

4. *Specific Objectives*
A. To provide visitors with various forms of access to contemporary art through direct contact with working artists.
B. To create a dialogue about contemporary art among artists, museum professionals, adult visitors, school children, teachers, and families.
C. To evaluate the effect of direct contact with artists on the visitors' overall perceptions of and interest in contemporary art.

5. *Project Description*
In conjunction with the Museum's Grand Lobby installations, three artists will participate in a ten-day artist-in-residence program. Each artist will work closely with members of the education department, curators, evaluators, and interns to develop a series of programs for the public that reflect the artists' interests and the perceived needs of the visitors. Programs may include demonstrations, gallery talks, studio tours, interviews, programs where children meet the artist, teacher-training workshops, and staff seminars. The installations and the programs will be documented on video. Through intensive evaluation we will obtain information about visitors' attitudes toward contemporary art before and after attending the programs. Although difficult to determine, we will also try to gauge the relationship between the visitors' interest in the Grand Lobby project, their experience with the artist-in-residence program, and their general visual literacy as reflected in visits to other exhibitions in the Museum.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
Staff time: two full-time staff at 10 percent time; one project coordinator at six months; one full-time intern at 100 percent time.
Expenses: $70,000 program budget.

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   John Schloder, Assistant Director for Education and Public Programs; (216) 421-7340.

2. *Project*
   Tracking and interviewing visitors in the Renaissance-Baroque galleries in preparation for the reinstallation of the galleries.

3. *Perceived Need*
   Focus Group participants visited one of the Renaissance galleries and commented on its installation and on individual works of art. As a follow-up, we observed a larger sampling of visitors in this gallery (#18), as well as in three others (#19, 20, 21), to study their visiting patterns and to record their observations on what attracted them to certain works of art.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To track the visitors through the four Renaissance-Baroque galleries to determine entry, exit, and stopping points, as well as circulation patterns through each gallery.
   B. To determine the attracting and holding power of objects in the four galleries.

5. *Project Description*
   Working with faculty and graduate students from the Weatherhead School of Business (Case Western Reserve University), a Museum team comprised of curators, educators, and administrators devised a three-week study. In Phase I, five graduate students observed 359 visitors in the galleries, noting where they entered, exited, and stopped. As they left the galleries, visitors were asked to recall what the most memorable objects in the galleries were and why. Responses were recorded in the visitors' own words. Additional comments or reactions to the galleries were also noted. In Phase II, one element was changed in each of the galleries to determine if we could increase the attracting and holding power of objects. In Gallery 18, a case of Venetian glass, normally lit by a timer, was left permanently illuminated; in Gallery 19, a large label on a stanchion was placed beside a painting largely ignored by visitors; in Gallery 20, comfortable seating was placed in front of a group of paintings; in Gallery 21, a large label placed in front of that gallery's most popular painting suggested that visitors view other paintings by the same master on the far side of the gallery. Each alteration, with the exception of additional seating, significantly increased visitor attention to the object(s).

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   Staff time: preparation, 90 hours; survey, 173 hours; data entry, 60 hours; evaluation, 150 hours. Expenses: interviewers, $3,000; materials, $1,000. Note: consulting by faculty members of Case Western Reserve University was done on a pro bono basis.

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   John Schloder, Assistant Director for Education and Public Programs; (216) 421-7340.

2. *Project*
   Analysis and amelioration of the Museum's orientation system.

3. *Perceived Need*
   Focus group participants were unanimous in their desire for better wayfinding systems.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To study the present orientation system within the Museum.
   B. To make recommendations to improve the present system and make the visit more enjoyable for the visitor.
   C. To implement these recommendations in time for the Museum's 75th anniversary in 1991.

5. *Project Description*
   A five-member team, composed of staff from the administration, as well as from the curatorial, education, and public information departments, undertook a major reinvestigation of the present system in order to recommend options for improvement. At various stages these ideas were presented at meetings of curators, educators, designers, and building and grounds personnel, who were asked for their input. As a result, several new systems will be implemented, including: 1) the creation of new signage both within and outside the Museum; 2) a new system of gallery numbers and names; 3) new information stations at strategic choice points throughout the building; and 4) a new museum map. Prototypes of these systems will be ready in summer 1990. Visitor evaluation of these systems will then take place. Modifications will be made and tested. The new systems will be put in place no later than June 1991.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   Staff time: research, 275 hours; development of prototype, 80 hours; evaluation, 360 hours. Production and installation are expected to take six months. Expenses: maps, $25,000; information stations, $8,000; signage, $10,000.

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   John Schloder, Assistant Director for Education and Public Programs; (216) 421-7340.

2. *Project*
   In-depth interviews with frequent visitors, less-frequent visitors, and first-time visitors concerning their perceptions and experiences in the Renaissance-Baroque galleries.

3. *Perceived Need*
   As Alan Newman stressed in his final report of the Focus Group study, the sampling of any focus group is too small to be generalized. It can, however, suggest new paths to follow. We therefore decided to do a series of in-depth interviews with thirty frequent visitors (those who visit more than seven times a year), with ten less-frequent visitors (those who visit one to six times a year), and with ten first-time visitors, to determine if the perceptions and informational concerns of the Focus Group participants were valid for a larger sampling of visitors.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To determine what makes a visit to the Renaissance-Baroque galleries a rewarding experience for our frequent visitors to establish a foundation for an interpretive system in the galleries that would create an optimum opportunity for learning.
   B. To identify points of interest that would make the collection more meaningful for the first-time visitor.
   C. To discern if information from parallel fields, such as music, literature, and history, could be used by our diverse audiences as entry points to the works of art.
   D. To determine what kinds of informational systems should be designed for the galleries.

5. *Project Description*
   Working with educational psychologist Howard Gardner and his colleagues at Project Zero (Harvard University), the Museum team, comprised of curators, educators, and administrators, devised an interview sheet related to the Renaissance-Baroque galleries. Each interview, which was conducted jointly by the team, lasted approximately one hour. All interviews were transcribed; the resulting document runs 458 pages. A summary of the findings is being prepared by Liz Rosenblatt of Project Zero. Findings from the interviews will be compared to those of the Focus Group project. Pertinent ideas from both studies will be further tested in an experimental gallery before being incorporated into the planning for the reinstallation of the Renaissance-Baroque galleries.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   Staff time: preparation, 50 hours; interviews, 50 hours; compilation and transcription, 150 hours; editing, 60 hours; summary preparation, 180 hours. Expenses: consultant fees, $10,000 (including travel); materials, $500.

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   John Schloder, Assistant Director for Education and Public Programs; (216) 421-7340.

2. *Project*
   Experimental gallery for testing various aspects of informational systems.

3. *Perceived Need*
   Focus Group visitors were unanimous in their desire for more information about objects in the collection. They all agreed that the size and location of the present Museum labels made them difficult to read and that staff used obscure art historical terms. The visitors differed, however, on what type of information they wanted and how they wanted this information presented.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To provide a foundation for developing creative ways of presenting information about the collection in the reinstalled Renaissance-Baroque galleries and for establishing guidelines for labeling throughout the museum.
   B. To determine the importance of the information already given to visitors.
   C. To determine what additional information visitors want.
   D. To determine the most appropriate way of presenting this information in order to make the collection more meaningful for our visitors.

5. *Project Description*
   An experimental gallery will be set up to test the validity of various hypotheses about the content and presentation of information within the Museum. A team of educators, curators, administrators, the director, and the designer have prepared a list of experiments to try out in the gallery. Data will be collected through observations, interviews, and questionnaires. After analyzing the data for each experiment, the team will have the option of modifying the series to incorporate additional visitor needs. The first series of experiments will concern labeling; phase one will test the importance of the factual identifying information presently given on Museum labels. Future experiments will deal with content, size and placement of labels, as well as with the relevancy to our audiences of other types of informational systems—brochures, videos, audiocassettes.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   Staff time: preparation, 270 hours; experimentation and evaluation, 270 hours; compilation of statistics, 80 hours; design and installation, 24 hours; print shop, 16 hours; evaluation, 30 hours. Expenses: consultants, interviewers, evaluator, $5,000; materials, $5,000.

DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
Nancy Berry, Director of Public Programs; (214) 922-1223.

2. *Project*
Reinstallation of the permanent collections of pre-Columbian Art

3. *Perceived Needs*
The Dallas Museum of Art collection of 3,500 pre-Columbian objects, covering all the cultures in Central and South America, is one of its greatest strengths. However, the Focus Group confirmed a need for more cultural and geographical information: "I know so little about these cultures and their historical perspective, I found it difficult to relate to." Members of the Focus Group asked for signs, text panels, larger labels, and videos. They found the installation repetitive and confusing. Some needed a definition of "pre-Columbian"; others could not differentiate pre-Columbian art from that of other ancient societies.

4. *Specific Objectives*
A. To reinstall the pre-Columbian collection to enhance its communication of cultural beliefs and aesthetic decisions in ancient America.
B. To provide materials that introduce the worldview underlying the creation, use, and meaning of the art, employing various formats for different learning levels.
C. To exercise the methods of collaboration developed in the past two years between the education, curatorial, and design departments.

5. *Project Description*
A team of two educators and two curators is formulating the content and formats for interpretive materials to serve school and adult audiences of varying ethnic and educational backgrounds. New labels, text panels, maps, and timelines will help explain the objects and locate them in time and place. A video in the gallery will provide the archaeological context. A gallery guide (written in both English and Spanish) will feature important works and will discuss widely held recurring themes in pre-Columbian societies. Objects will be installed in a more spacious arrangement to encourage greater visual interaction with them and to guide viewers' perceptions of the relative importance and meaning of them. Ongoing observation studies, occasional surveys, and a focus group evaluation between December 1990 and the summer of 1991 will determine the success of the reinstallation.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
Staff time estimated at 560 hours, plus outside consultants. Expenses: consultants, $8,000; production, $20,200; installation, $10,000. NEA funds ($10,000) cover text panels, labels, maps, timelines, and installation. Application has been made to the Getty Grant Program for funding of the gallery guides, video, and a focus group.

DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
Nancy Berry, Director of Public Programs; (214) 922-1223.

2. *Project*
Installation and interpretation of Egyptian objects on ten-year loan from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

3. *Perceived Need*
While Focus Groups did not specifically address the collection of Egyptian art, many observations about the pre-Columbian collections apply. Participants said the area lacked sufficient background and explanatory information: "They could have a history and show geographically where these came from, give a little bit of the time period." The Focus Group wanted larger labels and text panels and orientation programs nearer to the collections. They recommended Gateway Gallery, a wing of the museum devoted to education, for visitors of all ages.

4. *Specific Objectives*
A. To provide background and explanatory material in the Egyptian installation in a variety of formats for clients of all ages and levels of sophistication.
B. To establish a format for the reinstallation and interpretation of all the third floor collections of ancient and non-Western art.
C. To improve collaboration between education, curatorial and design departments on exhibition-related projects.

5. *Project Description*
Because of the length of the loan, these objects will be installed as a permanent collection by a team including an educator, a curator, and an exhibition designer. Labels and text panels will be written by the museum's former education director, now curator. Their format includes maps and photographs, as well as larger type and better placement for viewers. Three orientation devices will prepare visitors: 1) a multi-image slide show emphasizing Egyptian art and architecture; 2) a video within the installation that highlights the modern discovery, collection, and study of the objects, explains how they came to Dallas, then features the use and manufacture of the objects in ancient Egyptian society; and 3) an outreach slide/talk and art activity for schools, hospitals, community centers, and so on. Every school group visiting the installation will receive materials including a loose-leaf children's catalog and an interactive poster. An interactive family guide will be distributed in Gateway Gallery, which also offers "Clues Tours" with looking games. Evaluation, including visitor surveys, interviews, and a focus group, will extend from October 1990 until May 1991.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
Staff time is estimated at 1,440 hours, plus an outside evaluator. The project budget, $223,000, is fully funded by a grant from the Edward and Betty Mascus Foundation.

DENVER ART MUSEUM

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   Patterson Williams, Director of Education; (303) 640-2008.

2. *Project*
   Reinstallation of the Asian Collections

3. *Perceived Need*
   As expressed in our Mission Statement, the Denver Art Museum is "committed to enhancing the entire community's knowledge and understanding of human vision and expression, history and culture, through the proper display and interpretation of works of art in a manner that makes its collections meaningful and provides enjoyment to the public it serves." Visitors have described interest in having interpretive materials that articulate how the values and worldviews of an artist, a user of an object, or its patron affected the aesthetic quality, technical virtuosity, and/or iconography of an artwork.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To provide a strong visual display of objects in which the beauty of each object is emphasized.
   B. To provide interpretive information in a form that allows visitors individually to choose what interests them.
   C. To provide orientation assistance through threshold signs and maps, signature objects, a landmark map and comparative chronology, as well as a discovery desk in the lobby of the floor.
   D. To plan and implement this reinstallation through effective dialogue and teamwork among designers, educators, and curators.

5. *Project Description*
   The Asian collection, consisting of 3,100 objects, with a rotating gallery space for approximately 1,400 objects, will be reinstalled in a 22,000–square-foot gallery space. The collection will be organized into seven geographical areas and five theme areas according to the general interpretive theme "Making the Human Connection." "Choice Labels," "Learning Areas," and a "Resource/Browsing Room" will allow visitors to pursue information about the objects that are exhibited. The interpretive material will focus primarily on people—the makers, users, and patrons connected with the works of art. Wherever possible, "Human Connection" interpretive material will include first person testimony (quotes and photographs) and will give basic information about the maker or user. It will answer typical visitor questions such as: Why did he or she create it? What did it mean to him/her? How did it fit into his/her life? The installation is scheduled to be completed in February 1992.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   Staff time: 70 percent for one educator; 80 percent each for two curators. Consultant evaluators will also be hired to do formative testing of interpretive materials. Expenses: $445,310.

THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   Lori Starr, Head of Public Information; (213) 459-7611.

2. *Project*
   Audience development

3. *Perceived Need*
   In addition to the Focus Groups, a year-long visitor survey based on questionnaires completed by 2,442 adults and other surveys indicated that the Museum's visitor population is homogeneous, essentially white, upper middle class, well-educated professionals. A large percentage of the visitors are tourists and/or first-time visitors. Nontraditional audiences from the ethnically diverse population of Los Angeles appeared to have little knowledge of or experience with the Museum.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To encourage visitation by segments of the population not already served.
   B. To help visitors from a broad range of backgrounds understand the collections and improve their experiences at the Getty.
   C. To increase the number and frequency of repeat visits.
   D. To accommodate as many visitors as possible without overcrowding the galleries.
   E. To increase the level of interdepartmental cooperation in pursuit of educational and public affairs goals and objectives.
   F. To ensure maximum cost-efficiency of resources spent on educational and public affairs goals and objectives.

5. *Project Description*
   Pollare/Fischer, a marketing and communications firm, has been contracted to work with the staff of the departments of Public Information and Education and Academic Affairs at the Museum. In FY 90, they will 1) review the research on visitors that was already done by the Museum evaluator; 2) conduct a media relations audit of the Department of Public Information; 3) do market research on the effectiveness of the Museum's *Calendar*. In FY 91, they will 4) use telephone interviews and focus groups to research and suggest ways in which we can increase awareness of the Museum in the rapidly growing Hispanic population of Los Angeles; 5) initiate a program to encourage students on school visits to return with their parents; 6) redesign the *Calendar* and other museum publications; and 7) undertake other audience development initiatives, such as preparing public service announcements and a consumer media kit.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   For both FY 90 and 91, the total staff time is estimated at 2,000 hours. Expenses: consultant fees, $75,000; printed materials for the school/family program initiative, $12,500.

THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   David Ebitz, Head of Education and Academic Affairs; (213) 459-7611.

2. *Project*
   Events and wayfinding signage

3. *Perceived Need*
   Focus Group participants appreciated the slide show in the Orientation Theater and the gallery talks and other programs available to them in the Museum, but they commented that visitors are unaware of these services and have difficulty finding them: "There's no sign."

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To erect two signboards, one located in the vestibule (the second location to be determined), listing weekly gallery and docent background talks, and the monthly evening lectures, changing exhibitions, and other special events.
   B. To put a sign on the door opening into the area of the Orientation Theater and upgrade signage in the theater itself.

5. *Project Description*
   In FY 90, a chalkboard in the Museum vestibule was replaced by a stanchion and signboard designed by Michael Jurdan, a Los Angeles designer. The staff of the departments of Education and Academic Affairs, Public Information, and Publications collaborated in formatting the information to be included on the sign. The sign is composed of two desktop-printed sheets placed behind a plexiglass window. The upper sheet lists gallery talks and docent background talks three days at a time, and the lower sheet lists the changing exhibitions, lectures, and other special events of each month. In FY 91 a second signboard will be installed either at the entrance to the Orientation Theater or at the volunteer's post at the entrance to the Museum.

   A wayfinding sign directing visitors to the Orientation Theater was put up in FY 90 in conjunction with upgrading the signage in the theater itself. Education and Public Information staff are currently discussing other areas in the Museum that require new or upgraded wayfinding signage.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   In FY 90, formatting and designing the Orientation Theater signage required 10 hours of staff time; its production cost $1,400.

   In FY 90, designing the events signboard and stanchion cost $500 in consultant fees; constructing the first sign cost $400 in supplies and $300 for permanent lettering on the Plexiglass. Education, Public Information, Publications, and Preparations staff spent 120 hours in FY 90 constructing the stanchion and signboard, formatting the sign, and doing the weekly and monthly updates. In FY 91, staff time for constructing the second stanchion and doing the updates is estimated at 200 hours. Cost of the second stanchion will be $700, and supplies $500.

THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   David Ebitz, Head of Education and Academic Affairs; (213) 459-7611.

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2. *Project*
   Relabeling galleries

3. *Perceived Need*
   One participant in the focus groups said that "one of the things that really upsets most people about museums is when you go to read the little placards, you don't understand the vocabulary." Another said that the print was too small. Labels are currently prepared by each of the seven curatorial departments in a variety of different formats and sizes. Although members of the education staff have been reviewing the content of many of the new labels prepared over the past two years, until now there has been no systematic attempt to design a consistent format and size and to review the content of all object labels in the Museum.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To relabel approximately 400 objects on permanent exhibition.
   B. To rewrite object labels as necessary with the following guidelines in mind: the writing must be clear, concise and free of undefined technical terms; the label should direct visitors to important features observable in the object and aid in understanding their significance; and the label should anticipate and address questions visitors are likely to have. To reorganize and redesign object labels to improve readability and achieve consistency throughout the Museum.
   C. To strengthen collaboration between curatorial, education, and publications staff in the review and preparation of object labels.

5. *Project Description*
   In FY 90 we purchased a "transfix machine" that laminates desktop-printed labels onto Plexiglass plaques. Two label sizes were established incorporating an increase in type size to Palatino 13 point and a length of either 70 or 110 words, excluding tombstone information. Tombstone information is now organized in one of two standard formats. In accordance with procedures already in place, lecturers in the Department of Education and Academic Affairs review labels prepared by curatorial staff and with them arrive at a mutually agreed upon text. Labels are then sent to a Publications Department editor, after which they are desktop printed and laminated by members of the staff of the Publications Department. The project began in FY 90 with the relabeling of about 100 objects in a small gallery of Dutch Baroque paintings and a reinstalled gallery of Italian Renaissance art. It will continue, moving gallery to gallery during FY 91, when we anticipate relabeling an additional 300 objects.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   Staff time: curatorial, education, publications, and preparation staff time estimated at 1,200 hours. Expenses: in FY 90, equipment to laminate the labels cost $800; for FY 90–91, supplies are estimated at $2,000.

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
William J. Burback, Director, Department of Education;
(617) 267-9300 ext. 293.

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2. *Project*

The expansion of the Department of Education's role in the interpretation of works of art for museum visitors.

3. *Perceived Need*

In February 1989, the trustees approved the *Five Year Plan for Education Activities in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*. The Focus Group sessions, which were held during the eighteen months that the Plan was being formulated, increased the Museum's awareness of and commitment to the needs of the visitors. The Five Year Plan identified and made recommendations on seven issues. It calls for a more consistent and coordinated approach to the production of interpretive materials, which the curatorial departments should develop in close collaboration with the Department of Education. The Plan proposes creating an advisory group to assist in the development of Museum-wide directives and/or guidelines on the quality, format, and content of interpretive materials. A part-time staff person would be added to the Department of Education to assist in the preparation of these materials.

4. *Specific Objectives*

A. To reorganize the staff of the Department of Education to identify and define responsibility for the development of interpretive materials within the department.

B. To work with the curatorial staff to foster a consistent collaborative approach to interpretation. Establish policy and procedures, understood throughout the Museum, for identifying projects, priorities, and the division of labor.

5. *Project Description*

The Department of Education will be restructured to identify a division responsible for interpretation. Members of the Department of Education will meet with the administration and curatorial departments to formulate as Museum policy the Plan's recommendations regarding interpretation. An advisory group will be created to assist in the development of Museum-wide directives and/or guidelines on the quality and content of interpretive materials. Such a group should include representatives of at least the curatorial, design, and education departments.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*

We expect the process to take at least six months. The Department of Education will be charged for a consultant hired to evaluate and assess restructuring recommendations. We also anticipate that there will be salary increases associated with revised job descriptions and grade levels.

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   Gilian Wohlauer, Senior Lecturer; (617) 267-9300 ext. 377.

2. *Project*
   Three self-guided tours of the Asian galleries.

3. *Perceived Need*
   The Asian galleries tend to be under-visited, even by frequent museum-goers. Focus Group members were requested to visit several galleries in the Museum's extensive permanent collection of Asian art. Most expressed interest and pleasure in the objects they saw but felt the need for more information about them. Typical comments were: "I feel that I didn't have the background to really appreciate the Asian art"; and "I found the Asian exhibit intimidating and not as comfortable to be in because I knew so little." Existing labels are, for the most part, very brief and employ terminology unfamiliar to many visitors.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To highlight the Museum's collection of Asian art on the occasion of its 100th anniversary and at a time when Americans are increasingly aware of and interested in Asia.
   B. To make the Asian collection, well-known to specialists throughout the world, appealing and accessible to the general museum visitor, who might be reluctant to go into those galleries because of his/her unfamiliarity with Asian cultures, religions, and art.
   C. To create a successful model for collaboration among educators, curators, and designers, using the permanent collection.
   D. To assemble a body of information, including written summaries of the findings of evaluation procedures, that could be used for similar projects at the Museum and other museums.

5. *Project Description*
   A brochure describing three self-guided tours of the Asian galleries will be prominently displayed at several locations outside those galleries. The tours are thematic, leading visitors to many galleries and a range of objects from different Asian cultures. An interpretive label next to each of the ten to twelve objects on a given tour discusses such subjects as cultural context, function, technique, and style and encourages the visitor to compare and contrast this object with others in the gallery. In-depth interviews with ten museum-goers who rarely visit the Asian collection were conducted by an outside consultant; these helped to determine the content of the brochure and labels. In addition, a representative sample of visitors was observed and interviewed in the Asian galleries and then interviewed again after they had followed a mock-up of one tour; a similar group will be observed and interviewed once the entire project is complete. The project was conceived and executed collaboratively by seven members of the Asiatic, Education, and Publications Departments. Work on the project began in April 1989; the grant money was received in January 1990; the project is expected to be in place by August 1, 1990.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   A $25,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts supported production of 150,000 brochures, brochure racks, production of laser-printed labels, and fees for consultant evaluators. Staff time estimated for the grant was 1,428 hours.

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   Barbara Martin, Coordinator of Interpretive Materials;
   (617) 267-9300, ext. 307.

2. *Project*
   Major exhibition drawn from Museum storage, entitled *Unlocking the Hidden Museum: Riches from the Storerooms*.

3. *Perceived Need*
   Focus Group visitors were curious about several basic issues seldom addressed in conventional labels or installations. How did objects come to the Museum? Why are they important? Who decides what works are displayed and on what basis? Lack of information on these points contributed to a perception of the Museum as aloof and intimidating.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To introduce visitors to some of the questions of selection, comparison, conservation, and installation with which Museum staff are involved.
   B. To communicate with visitors more informally, dispelling some of the mystery surrounding the Museum, its values, and practices.
   C. To show visitors objects rarely exhibited and stimulate their interest in the depth and variety of the permanent collection.
   D. To further encourage collaboration between staff from different departments in the conceptual development of projects and exhibitions.

5. *Project Description*
   Unlocking the Hidden Museum contains more than 125 objects drawn from all the Museum's curatorial departments and representing all eras and all media. The exhibition is organized in thematic sections on such topics as quality, attribution and authenticity; changing taste; and condition and conservation. Extensive labels discuss both the specific object and the relevant theme—visitors are encouraged to make quality comparisons between similar works, to consider how personal and period taste enters into their responses. An introductory videotape, narrated by the director, includes visits to storage area and conservation studios and explains some of the reasons museums collect so much and have so many objects in storage. Our target audience is both the general museum-goer, curious about how the museum "works," and the casual visitor for whom an anecdotal and conversational approach might provide a means of entry. The curatorial committee, co-chaired by an educator and a curator, included two other members of the curatorial staff and a conservator; liaisons in each curatorial department served as a link to that collection and staff. Planning began in May 1989; exhibition dates are July 3–September 9, 1990. A survey is planned to gather visitors' responses to the issues discussed and to label tone and content, as well as to assess changes, if any, in their perception of the Museum, its role, and its permanent collections. Responses of frequent and occasional museum-goers will be compared. Information gathered will be used to plan other exhibitions and installations of the permanent collection and to write future labels.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   Staff time: Staff throughout the museum participated in the project. In addition to time usually given to a major special exhibition by the departments of design, publicity, facilities, administration, specific staff time included 2,000 hours from the five-person curatorial committee; 350 hours from the ten curatorial liaisons; and 1,750 hours of conservation. The exhibition was funded from the museum's operating budget. Expenses: installation, $48,000; publicity, $29,000; videotape, $4,500.

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
William J. Burback, Director, Department of Education; (617) 267-9300 ext. 293.

2. *Project*
The improvement of the general museum orientation.

3. *Perceived Need*
When Alan Shestack taught a museum course at Yale University, he cited the signage and floor plan of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, as examples of poor visitor orientation. Now, as the Museum's director, he is encouraging staff to act on his observations, which also correspond to the consensus of the Focus Groups.

4. *Specific Objectives*
A. To focus the attention of the Museum staff on the visitors' need to understand the physical plan and the Museum's point of view regarding the organization of the permanent collections.
B. To determine a clear and uniform system of gallery identification.
C. To provide a comprehensive signage system for the galleries.
D. To redesign the current museum map.
E. To develop a "highlights tour" of the permanent collection.

5. *Project Description*
The project, currently in a preliminary planning stage, draws on both the expertise of the museum staff and outside consultants. A variety of media and new technologies will be investigated during the planning phase. In developing plans, we will employ wayfinding and other techniques to understand and act upon the needs of the Museum visitors. All proposed solutions will be tested and evaluated by the public.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
Schedule and budget to be determined

THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
Linda Downs, Head of Education; (202) 842-6012.

2. *Project*
Improve the gallery information on the permanent collections.

3. *Perceived Need*
Focus Group visitors noted that information was well presented for special exhibitions, but was lacking for permanent collections. Visitors needed more information to place the works in historical, geographic, and aesthetic contexts and to understand the reason for the configuration of the installations of the permanent collections.

4. *Specific Objectives*
A. To increase the information offered to the public without aesthetically intruding on the works of art.
B. To establish what information will be of interest to the public and the vocabulary that is understandable to them.
C. To establish procedures for collaboration among the education, curatorial, and design departments to produce the information; and to establish with departments of art information, security, and/or visitor services a mechanism for the distribution/dissemination of the materials.
D. To complete a portion of the information system by the fiftieth anniversary of the National Gallery (March 1991) and to establish an ongoing program to complete the project and continually update the information.

5. *Project Description*
We will hire an evaluator to work with the staff to study and interview gallery visitors regarding content and format preferences. We will also study vocabulary by having visitors describe the information they read. Guided by the study and the aesthetic concerns of the institution, the educators will work in concert with the curators to determine how each collection should be presented. The Design Department and the Editors Office will design the format and presentation of the information in agreement with the curators and educators. A schedule will be jointly determined for the partial completion of the project by the date of the Museum's fiftieth anniversary and for an ongoing information system. Once the initial fiftieth anniversary phase is complete, the information, design, content, and presentation will be formally evaluated to help shape the future of the information system.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
Staff time for evaluation: education coordinator, 160 hours; two curators, 60 hours; six lecturers, 35 hours; one editor, 4 hours; silkscreen, 16 hours. Staff time for first-year production: two members of publications staff, one at 10 percent and one at 100 percent; twenty curators at 10 percent; two designers at 10 percent; one editor at 15 percent; one support staff member at 100 percent; one carpenter at 5 percent.
Expenses: consultant fees, $4,000; materials, $8,000; gallery storage units, $5,000.
Total budgeted cost: $188,420.

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   George Marcus, Head of Publications; (215) 763-8100.

2. *Project*
   Redesign of museum map

3. *Perceived Need*
   Focus Group visitors all expressed confusion regarding the museum's map. They found that it was hard to read and that the information was not entirely up to date. People could not readily find specific galleries, nor could they navigate through the museum using the existing map and sign system.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To make the museum more accessible by redesigning a map that would be easier to read and use.
   B. To use the map as a device for drawing people into some of the less populated, remote galleries.

5. *Project Description*
   A new map was designed incorporating input from museum staff and perceptions gleaned from focus groups. The new map has photographs of objects and brighter colors and a new organization that makes it more readable.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   Staff time: approximately 250 hours (including design department and other museum staff). Expenses: cash expenditures were approximately $16,000 (includes first printing of 100,000 maps).

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
Danielle Rice, Curator of Education; (215) 763-8100.

2. *Project*
Interpretive materials and improved sign system for twentieth-century galleries.

3. *Perceived Need*
Although many Focus Group visitors noted that the twentieth-century galleries were fun for children, they felt twentieth-century art made adults anxious and confused. Nonvisitors articulated expectations that they would not understand anything about modern art, and these expectations were fulfilled when they visited the Museum.

4. *Specific Objectives*
A. To improve directional signage in the twentieth-century galleries to help visitors understand the basis for the organization of the galleries.
B. To improve the design of the current object labels to make them more legible.
C. To create didactic materials that would give visitors a range of options from which to choose: i.e., for beginners a guide that spells out the basics of modern art; for more informed visitors, information regarding the artists and the socio-historical context of the art; for everyone, interesting information to help them understand individual objects.
D. To establish a procedure and a format for gallery information that could also be applied to other galleries.

5. *Project Description*
The 20th-Century Department, the Education Division, and the Publications Department will collaborate to produce a new information system for the Brancusi galleries. This will include new object labels, a sign designating the gallery, and an "information paddle" that visitors can read in the gallery. Once the Brancusi galleries are completed, we will study visitor reaction in order to determine how to proceed with the remaining twentieth-century galleries. We anticipate that the project will end by January 1991.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
Staff time: 2,075 hours. Expenses: $70,000 ($15,000 has been granted by the NEA, and $5,000 has been raised through private contribution; the remainder comes from the Museum's operating budget and includes overhead and in-kind costs.)

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   Anne d'Harnoncourt, Director; (215) 763-8100.

2. *Project*
   Reinstallation of Museum collections (Johnson Galleries, period rooms, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings).

3. *Perceived Need*
   As conceived by Fiske Kimball in the 1920s, the Philadelphia Museum of Art was intended to be a walk through time and space. Kimball's collections of architectural interiors, installed chronologically and according to geographic location, structured the distribution of the collections. But as more distinct collections were acquired, the intended logic of Kimball's plans was occluded. The somewhat idiosyncratic location of restricted collections, such as the Johnson Collection, makes it difficult for visitors to comprehend the Museum's organization.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To plan and execute the reinstallation of major portions of the permanent collections to provide a more logical, chronological relationship.
   B. To renovate the building to improve lighting and create more effective gallery spaces.
   C. To plan and execute appropriate interpretive materials for the newly reinstalled galleries.

5. *Project Description*
   This is a large-scale project, which has already been in progress for a number of years and will probably take three to five more years to execute. An NEH planning grant enabled the Museum to bring in consultants of international repute and from a broad range of disciplines to look at the current distribution of the collections and advise on the reinstallation. The Focus Group interviews were conducted at a crucial time in the project, just as the consultants had finished submitting their reports. In selecting galleries for the Focus Group participants to examine, the Museum staff was aware of the reinstallation project and in effect used the Focus Group participants as lay consultants. As we embark on the implementation part of the reinstallation project, the experience of the Focus Groups will continue to inform our thinking about interpretive materials and the organization of the collections. Focus Group participants also proved themselves to be extremely perceptive about issues of lighting and gallery design.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   No figures are available at this time.

SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   Jill Rullkoetter, Head of Education; (206) 625-8909.

2. *Project*
   To provide the visitor with more coherent and helpful information by redesigning the lobby and reorganizing museum departments.

3. *Perceived Need*
   Focus Group visitors repeatedly mentioned their confusion and feelings of inhospitality at the Museum entrance, which they characterized as "austere, pompous, and uninviting." The placement of the admissions and information desk near the store and stairway disoriented visitors, who tended to wander first into the Museum store or down the stairway to the lower-level auditorium, offices, and restrooms instead of toward the galleries of the permanent collection and special exhibitions. Visitors also commented that the volunteer personnel at the admissions desk were uninformed and often unreliable.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To reorient the Museum entry and admissions area.
   B. To redesign signs and maps for clarity.
   C. To hire professional personnel to staff the admissions desk on the Museum's busiest days and work with the admissions' volunteers.
   D. To restructure museum departments to create a division specifically concerned with visitors' needs.

5. *Project Description*
   The Seattle Art Museum's project to improve its relationship with visitors involved several departments interested in the flow of visitors through the building. Staff members who were involved in the initial planning stages included the assistant curator of modern art, head of education, volunteer coordinator, public affairs officer, museum store manager, publications manager, graphic artist, chief of security, assistant chief of security, maintenance engineer, and membership manager. The project was overseen by the head of councils and volunteer management, with the particular assistance of the chief of security.

   The renovation of the Museum's lobby was central to the project. The admissions area was moved from the south to the north side of the entrance, creating a more coherent flow through the building: from the entrance to the admissions desk and immediately to the galleries. Interior design improvements lightened the atmosphere of the lobby. Modified phone service lessened obtrusive ringing, and a new recorded message gave callers needed information or the opportunity to speak directly with staff personnel. The former admissions area became a membership information and sales area. Finally, signage was developed that more effectively informs the visitor of Museum programs and, through the use of a gallery map, the specific location of collections.

A division of External Affairs was created, combining departments that interact with our visitors: Public Affairs, Media and Publications, Volunteer Management, Security, Facilities Management, and a new department, Visitor Services. The division of External Affairs specifically considers the needs of visitors from the point of view of the visitors themselves. It covers a wide range of issues, from media relations and publicity to text panels, object labels and the training of guards and volunteers.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses* Staff time: Project Manager, 70 hours; Chief of Security, 15 hours; security staff, 70 hours; other staff, 30 hours; contractors, 200 hours. The cost for the lobby renovation project was $13,968.65: Revenue from museum operations, including: facilities, $8,500; special equipment fund, $3,700; admissions, $1,768.65; Total, $13,968.65. Expenses: contractor fees (includes his materials), $5,741.72; reglazing facade windows, $6,000; other professional services, $869.17; other materials, $273.18; equipment, $1,084.58; Total, $13,968.65.

THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   Rose M. Glennon, Chairman of Museum Education; (419) 255-8000.

2. *Project*
   Wayfinding and orientation

3. *Perceived Need*
   Focus Group participants indicated that finding their way around the Museum and locating specific galleries were difficult tasks. The American art galleries, although recently renovated, were cited as "maze-like" in their arrangement; visitors found it confusing to determine where they were going on a floor plan.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To reconfigure some galleries for smoother visitor traffic patterns.
   B. To investigate what architectural barriers inhibit effective wayfinding in the Museum.
   C. To develop and test with visitors new floor plans and architectural graphics as possible solutions to these barriers.
   D. To assemble ideas for an orientation videotape to be produced by fall 1992.

5. *Project Description*
   Through the current west wing gallery renovation project, we hope to assist visitors in selecting a route suited to their own interests and compatible with the Museum's new gallery arrangement. We have determined at least four points in the galleries where supplemental directional signs and "YOU ARE HERE" floor plans are needed. During the fall of 1990 we will test some floor plan samples and other wayfinding devices.

   Environmental psychologists Rachel and Stephen Kaplan of the University of Michigan are advising us on areas of possible visitor confusion and developing with us ways of overcoming these barriers to enjoying the Museum. By June 1991, when the west wing galleries reopen, a new floor plan and accompanying architectural graphics will eliminate the confusion that Focus Group visitors experienced. The University of Michigan research team will evaluate the effectiveness of wayfinding devices (as well as interpretive strategies) with visitors during the summer of 1991. Through their research, we also hope to gather ideas for an orientation videotape.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   Staff time is estimated at 300 hours. Expenses: consultant research team for the initial phases of the work, $1,500 (total cost for 1990–91 would be $32,000 and has been requested from the Getty Grant Program); cost of mailing a members' survey to determine their purposes for visiting the Museum, $500; prototype directional signs, about $2,000.

THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART

1. *Museum Staff Contact*
   Rose M. Glennon, Chairman of Museum Education; (419) 255-8000.

2. *Project*
   Printed interpretive materials.

3. *Perceived Need*
   Focus Group participants proved the effectiveness of gallery introduction statements that place works of art in an aesthetic and historical context. In the Classic Court, where these statements and additional interpretive labels are available, visitors understood very specific concepts about the various cultures and objects representing those cultures. In the American galleries, where no interpretive information was available, visitors' understanding of the art was haphazard and at times distorted.

4. *Specific Objectives*
   A. To provide visitors with a sense of the historical continuum of art as represented in the permanent collection of the Toledo Museum.
   B. To highlight objects of special importance.
   C. To give visitors more extensive background on selected objects, using historical events, social issues, or creative concerns of the artist.

5. *Project Description*
   In planning the reinstallation of the permanent collection, the director, curators, and educators have focused on establishing a chronological sequence, emphasizing the ideas and information most helpful to visitors in understanding and enjoying the works of art in each gallery. Basic gallery introduction statements in the new installation will explain unifying aspects of the works in the gallery. Brief interpretive information added to selected object labels will signal works as special importance for the visitor. For works requiring more extensive historical, social, or critical background, laminated cards (experimented with on the Museum's new painting by Baron Gros) will be provided.

   As we develop information and work out the arrangement for each gallery, an environmental psychology team from the University of Michigan will test prototypes with visitors.

6. *Estimated Staff Time; Out of Pocket Expenses*
   Staff time is estimated at 4000 hours. Consultant research team costs will be $32,000. Grants to cover these and other costs for installation and interpretation materials have been requested from the Getty Grant Program, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Toledo Community Foundation.

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